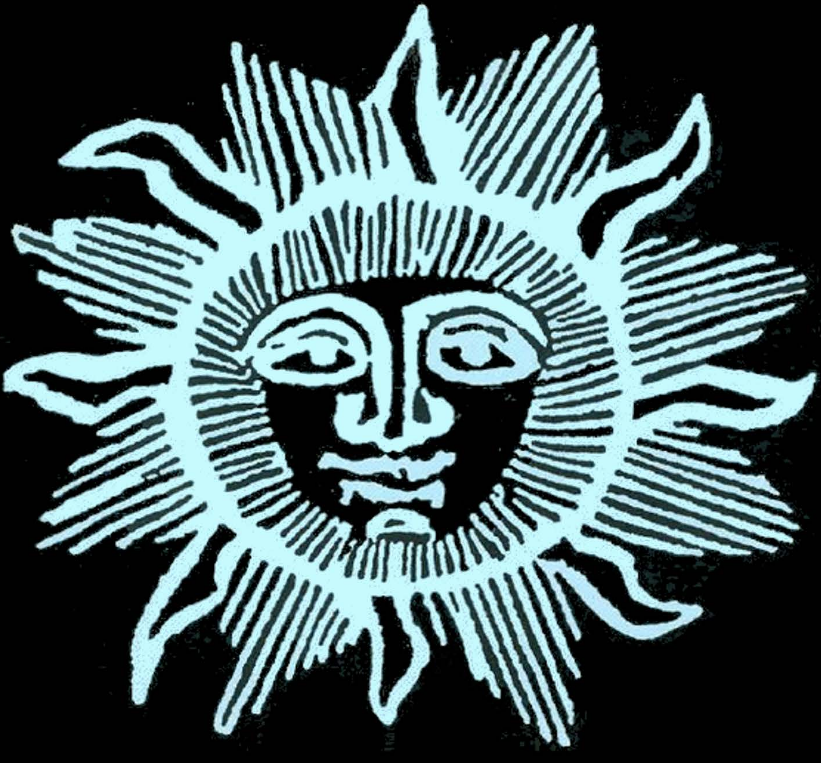

MEDITATIONS ON THE PEAKS

JULIUS EVOLA

HERITAGE

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PART ONE

Doctrine

1

The Mountain and Spirituality

In the modern world there are two factors that, more than any others, are responsible for hindering our realization of the spirituality that was known in the most ancient traditions: the first is the abstract character of our culture; the second is the glorification of a blind and frantic obsession with activity.

On one hand, there are people who identify the "spirit" with the erudition acquired in libraries and university classrooms, or with the intellectual games played by philosophers, or with literary or pseudomystical aestheticism. On the other hand, the new generations have turned athletic competition into a religion and appear to be unable to conceive anything beyond the excitement of training sessions, competitions, and physical achievements; they have truly turned accomplishment in sports into an end in itself and even into an obsession rather than as means to a higher end.

Some people regard this opposition of lifestyles as some kind of dilemma. In reality, in the so-called scholarly type, we often find an innate strong dislike for any kind of physical discipline; likewise, in many sports-practicing people, the sense of physical strength fosters contempt for those in "ivory towers" who confine themselves to books and to battles of words they view as harmless.

These two lifestyles should be regarded as misguided and as the fruits of modern decadence because they are both foreign to the heroic vision of the spirit that constituted the axis of the best Western classical traditions which, in the context of the actual renovation of Italy, is being successfully evoked.

All too often people forget that spirituality is essentially a way of life and that its measure does not consist of notions, theories, and ideas that have been stored in one's head. Spirituality is actually what has been successfully actualized and translated into a sense of superiority which is experienced inside by the soul, and a noble demeanor, which is expressed in the body.

From this perspective it is possible to appreciate a discipline which, although it may concern the energies of the body, will not begin and end with them but will become instead the means to awakening a living and organic spirituality. This is the discipline of a superior inner character.

In the ascetic, such a discipline is present in a negative way, so to speak; in the hero it is present in a positive, affirmative way, typical of the Western world. The inner victory against the deepest forces that surface in one's consciousness during times of tension and mortal danger is a triumph in an external sense, but it is also the sign of a victory of the spirit against itself and of an inner transfiguration. Hence, in antiquity an aura of sacredness surrounded both the hero and the initiate to a religious or esoteric movement, and heroic figures were regarded as symbols of immortality.

However, in modern civilization everything tends to suffocate the heroic sense of life. Everything is more or less mechanized, spiritually impoverished, and reduced to a prudent and regulated association of beings who are needy and have lost their self-suffiency. The contact between man's deep and free powers and the powers of things and of nature has been cut off; metropolitan life petrifies everything, syncopates every breath, and contaminates every spiritual "well." As if that weren't enough, faint-hearted ideologies foster contempt for those values that in other times were the foundation of more rational and bright social organizations. In ancient societies the peak of the hierarchy was occupied by the caste of warrior aristocracy, whereas today, in the pacifist-humanitarian utopias (especially in the Anglo-Saxon ones), attempts are made to portray the warrior as some kind of anachronism, and as a dangerous and harmful entity that one day will be conveniently disposed of in the name of progress.

Once it is suffocated, the heroic will seek further outlets outside the net of practical interests, passions, and yearnings, and that net becomes tighter and tighter with the passing of time: the excitement that sports induce in our contemporaries is just an expression of this. But the heroic will need to be made self-aware again and to move beyond the limits of materialism.

In the struggle against mountain heights, action is finally free from all machines, and from everything that detracts from man's direct and absolute relationship with things. Up close to the sky and to crevasses—among the still and silent greatness of the peaks; in the impetuous raging winds and snowstorms; among the dazzling brightness of glaciers; or among the fierce, hopeless verticality of rock faces—it is possible to reawaken (through what may at first appear to be the mere employment of the body) the symbol of overcoming, a truly spiritual and virile light, and make contact with primordial forces locked within the body's limbs. In this way the climber's struggle will be more than physical and the successful climb may come to represent the achievement of something that is no longer merely human. In ancient mythologies the mountain peaks were regarded as the seats of the gods; this is myth, but it is also the allegorical expression of a real belief that may always come alive again *sub specie interioritatis.*

In life—as has been pointed out, since Nietzsche, by Simmel—humans have a strange and almost incredible power to reach certain existential peaks at which "living more" *(mehr leben),* or the highest intensity of life, is transformed into "more than living" *(mehr als leben).* At these peaks, just as heat transforms into light, life becomes free of itself; not in the sense of the death of individuality or some kind of mystical shipwreck, but in the sense of a transcendent affirmation of life, in which anxiety, endless craving, yearning and worrying, the quest for religious faith, human supports and goals, all give way to a dominating state of calm. There is something greater than life, within life itself, and not outside of it. This heroic experience is valuable and good in itself, whereas ordinary life is only driven by interests, external things, and human conventions. I use the word *experience,* because this state is not connected with any particular creed or theory (which are always worthless and relative); rather it presents itself in a most direct and undoubtable way, just like the experiences of pain and pleasure.

This profound dimension of the spirit, which perceives itself as infinite, self-transcending, and beyond all manifest reality, is reawakened and shines forth—even though not entirely consciously—in the "insanity" of those who, in increasing numbers and without a specific reason, dare to challenge the mountain heights, led by a will that prevails over fears, exhaustion, and the primitive instincts of prudence and self-preservation.

Feeling left with only one's resources, without help in a hopeless situation, clothed only in one's strength or weakness, with no one to rely upon other than one's self; to climb from rock to rock, from hold to hold, from ridge to ridge, inexorably, for hours and hours; with the feeling of the height and of imminent danger all around; and finally, after the harsh test of calling upon all one's self-discipline, the feeling of an indescribable liberation, of a solar solitude and of silence; the end of the struggle, the subjugation of fears, and the revelation of a limitless horizon, for miles and miles, while everything else lies down below—in all of this one can truly find the real possibility of purification, of awakening, of the rebirth of something transcendent.

It does not matter that the heroic symbolism of the mountain can only be experienced initially by a few people. When these meanings are duly focused upon, they will influence people. There is no real climber who is not able to experience mountain climbing, if only in a few occasional flashes, as something more than a mere sport. Likewise, there is no real climber who does not display, in the eyes or in the face darkened by the sun's reflection on the snow, the mark of a race that has transformed beyond that of the people of the plains.

On this basis, we should save the mountains from the contaminating invasion of tourists who attempt to conquer them by building their "civilized" base camps. I am not just referring to those faint-hearted youths who bring with them to popular mountain resorts their vain, mundane city habits (such as discos and tennis courts), and who snobbishly display the colorful new equipment they've bought to use only for some harmless walk in the woods. I am also referring to those who tarnish silent and uncontaminated places with materialism and triviality, namely with a competitive spirit and a mania for that which is difficult and unusual, for the sake of setting new records.

The mountain requires purity and simplicity; it requires asceticism.

> O sky above me! O pure, deep sky! You abyss of light! Gazing into you, I tremble with divine desires. To cast myself into your height—that is my depth! To hide myself in your purity—that is my innocence! And when I wandered alone what did my soul hunger after by night and on treacherous paths? And when I climbed mountains, whom did I always seek, if not you, upon mountains? And all my wandering and mountain climbing, it was merely a necessity and an expedient of clumsiness: my whole will desires only to fly, to fly into you! [Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (translated by Hollingdale, Penguin, 1961), 184]

These are words that Friedrich Nietzsche, the philosopher who championed the will to power, wrote in the secluded mountains of Engadine. To some people these words may amount to nothing more than lyrical effusions. To others they may contain both the intimate sense of the heroic spiritual attitude, the spirit of which is action, and the discipline of ruthless self-control. The temple of this spirit is the primordial majesty of the peaks, the glaciers, the crevasses, and the boundless blue sky.

In this context the mountainous peaks and the spiritual peaks converge in one simple and yet powerful reality.

2

Some Remarks Concerning the Divinity of the Mountains

In an editorial published in the *Rivista del Club Alpino Italiano* [Review of the Italian Mountain Association], S. Manaresi has underlined with efficacious words something that can never be overemphasized, namely, the necessity of overcoming the limiting antithesis between a scholarly, physically weak type—who is cut off from the deepest forces of the body and of life because of his self-imposed confinement to a culture made of words and books—and the sports-minded, healthy, athletic, and physically strong type—who nevertheless lacks all metaphysical reference points. It is necessary today to go beyond the one-sidedness of either of these two types and to reach something more complete, namely, a human being in whom the spirit becomes power and life and in whom physical discipline in turn becomes the introduction to, the symbol and almost a rite of, a spiritual discipline.

S. Manaresi has repeatedly claimed that among sports, mountain climbing is certainly the one that offers the most accessible opportunities for achieving this union of body and spirit. Truly, the enormity, the silence, and the majesty of the great mountains naturally incline the soul toward that which is greater than human, and thus attract the better people to the point at which the physical aspect of climbing (with all the courage, the self-mastery, and mental lucidity that it requires) and an inner spiritual realization, become the inseparable and complementary parts of one and the same thing.

It may be interesting to remark that views such as these, which today are beginning to be emphasized by qualified individuals in order to promote the right attitudes in the next generation, can at the same time be traced to a very ancient tradition, to something which may be called traditional in the broadest sense of the word. Although the ancients did not practice mountain climbing, notwithstanding a few rudimentary exceptions, they nonetheless had a very vivid sense of the sacredness and symbolism of the mountain. They also thought—and this is rather telling—that climbing mountains and living therein was a prerogative of heroes and initiates, in other words, beings who were believed to have gone beyond the limits of the common and mediocre life of the plains.

In the following pages I will offer a few comments on the traditional notion of the divinity of the mountain, looking beyond its symbols to its inner sense. Hopefully my observations will evoke some aspects of the spiritual side of mountain-climbing feats, the technical description of which only represents the outer dimension, or the *caput mortuum.*

The notion of the divinity of the mountains is found equally in both Eastern and Western traditions, from the Chinese to the Aztecs of pre-Columbian America; from the Egyptians to the Aryan Nordic-Germanics; from Greeks to Iranians to Hindus. This notion is expressed in the form of myths and legends concerning either the mountain of the gods or of the heroes—which is allegedly the dwelling place of those who have been "taken up there"—or places inhabited by mysterious forces of glory and immortality.

The general foundation for the symbolism of the mountain is simple: since the earth has been associated with everything human (the etymology of the word *human* is from *humus,* "soil"), the earth's peaks, which reach to the sky and which are transfigured by perennial snow, were spontaneously regarded as the most apt material to express, through allegories, transcendental states of consciousness, inner spiritual realizations, and apparitions of extranormal modes of being, often portrayed figuratively as gods and supernatural beings. Thus, we read not only of the mountains as symbolic "seats" of the gods, but we also encounter pertinent traditions, such as those of the ancient Aryans living in Iran and in Media, in which people, according to Xenophon, never erected temples for their deities, but used mountain peaks to celebrate the cult of and the sacrifice to fire and the god of light. These cultures regarded mountains as worthier, more grandiose sites, analogically closer to the divine than any man-made temple or sacred building.

According to the Hindus, the most divine mountain chain is the Himalayan, a name that means in Sanskrit, "the seat of the snows." More specifically, Mount Meru is the sacred mountain and is believed to be located in the Himalayas. It is important to note two things. First, Mount Meru is conceived to be the place in which Shiva, the great ascetic, performed his meditations. Second, it is from here that Shiva incinerated Kama, the Hindu god of love, when the latter tried to expose his heart to passion. In the Hindu tradition, the idea of absolute asceticism and stringent purification of nature is associated with the highest mountain peak. This idea is inaccessible to anything coming from lust and desire and is therefore stable in a transcendent sense. Hence, in the ancient Vedic formulas for the consecration of kings, we find the image of the mountain symbolizing the stability of the power and of the imperium the king will assume. Moreover, in the Mahabarata we see Arjuna go to the Himalayas in order to practice asceticism because it is written that "only on the high mountains could he have achieved the divine vision." Likewise, the emperor Yudhisthira traveled to the Himalayas to achieve his apotheosis by climbing onto the "chariot" of the "king of the gods."

It is also notable that the Sanskrit word *paradesha* means "elevated site," or "high region," and therefore, in a specific material sense, mountain peak. But *paradesha* may be etymologically associated with the Chaldean word *pardes;* hence the term *paradise,* which has been turned into a dogmatic theological concept by the later Judeo-Christian faith. In the primordial Aryan idea of paradise, we find an intimate association with the concept of heights, of mountain peaks; this association, as we shall see later on, is formulated in a clear manner in the Doric-Achaean notion of Olympus.

At this point I must mention the Hellenic legends of those mythic characters who have been transported to a mountain. It is well known that the Hellenes, just like almost all the other Aryan tribes, had a markedly aristocratic view of the postmortem. The fate of most people, of those who never elevated themselves over and above ordinary life, was thought to be Hades, namely, a larval and residual existence after death, devoid of true consciousness, spent in the underground world of shadows. Immortality, besides the Olympian gods', was the privilege of the heroes, or, in other words, was the exceptional achievement of a few superior beings. In the oldest Hellenic traditions we find that the heroes' achievement of immortality was often portrayed through the symbolism of their ascending or disappearing into the mountains. Thus, we find again the mystery of the heights, since in this disappearing we must see the material symbol of a spiritual transfiguration. The expressions "to disappear," "to become invisible," and "to be taken up into the peaks," should not be taken literally, but essentially mean to be virtually introduced to the world beyond the senses, in which there is no death, and removed from the visible world of physical bodies, which is that of common human experience.

This tradition is by no means confined to Greece. In Buddhism mention is made of a mountain to which those who achieve spiritual enlightenment, described by the Majjhima Nikkayo as "further-men, undefeated and intact beings, extinct to and free from craving," are said to disappear. Chinese Taoist traditions speak of Mount Kuen-Lun, on which legendary royal beings have found the potion of immortality. Something similar is found in some Eastern Islamic traditions concerning people who have gone through initiation and have been taken to a mountain, thus being spared the experience of death. Ancient Egyptians talked about a mountain (Seth Amentet) that houses a passage through which those who are destined to "solar" immortality eventually enter a "triumphant land," in which, according to a hieroglyphic inscription, "the leaders who dwell by the throne of the great god proclaim their eternal life and power."

Crossing the Atlantic Ocean, in pre-Columbian Mexico we find an impressive correspondence with these symbols: the great mountain Culhuacan (meaning "curved mountain," because its top is bent slightly downward) was thought of as a divine point that, regardless of its loft, maintained a connection with the inferior regions. According to ancient American traditions, some Aztec emperors were believed to have disappeared in an analogous mountain. It is well known that this theme is found in the legends of the Western Roman-Germanic Middle Ages: mountains such as the Kyffhauser and the Odenberg were believed to be places where kings such as Charlemagne, Arthur, Frederick I, and Frederick II had been taken. These kings allegedly are not dead but are waiting for the time to appear again. In the cycle of the legends of the grail, we find Mount Monsalvat, which means, according to Guénon, "mountain of health" or "mountain of salvation." The battle cry of the medieval knights was "Montjoie." In a legend that has no historical counterpart whatsoever, but that nevertheless has a very rich spiritual meaning, to go through a mountain was the step preceding the sacred imperial coronation of Arthur. I cannot describe in detail the inner meaning of these symbols and myths, especially those concerning the kings who have disappeared but who are going to return one day. I will only say that in these myths of many different origins we find the common theme of the mountain conceived as a seat of immortality where spiritual people become realized and heroes disappear.

My next remarks concern two points: the mountain as the seat of the *haoma* and of the glory and the mountain as Walhalla.

The Iranian term *haoma* corresponds to the Sanskrit *soma*, the so-called potion of immortality. In these two ancient Aryan ideas we have an association of different concepts, partly real and partly symbolic, partly material and partly translatable into terms describing spiritual experience. Hindu traditions, for instance, describe the soma both as a god and as the juice of a plant that is capable of inducing feelings of exaltation. These feelings were highly regarded and were induced during rituals of inner transformation to provide a taste of immortality.

Just as Buddha compared to a high mountain the state "in which there is no here nor there, no coming or going, but calmness and enlightenment as in an infinite ocean" (the state of nirvana), likewise we read in Yashna that the mysterious haoma grows on high mountains. And so, once again, we find the association of the idea of heights with the idea of an enthusiasm capable of transforming, inspiring, and leading people to that which is beyond human, mortal, and ephemeral. This very same theme is also found in Greece in early Dionysism. According to very ancient testimonies, those who, during religious festivals, were possessed by the "divine frenzy of Dionysus," were led toward the wild peaks of the Thracian mountains by a strange and overwhelming power that arose in their souls.

And yet there is something else that can correct whatever is still chaotic and not completely pure at a Dionysian level; there is an ancient Iranian view, espoused by the *Yasht,* concerning the mountain, namely, the mighty Mount Ushi-darena, which is also the seat of glory.

In the Iranian tradition, "glory" *(hvareno* or *farr)* was not an abstract concept. It was conceived as a real and almost physical force, although invisible and of nonhuman origin. Glory was generally the privilege of the luminous Aryan race, but more specifically it belonged to kings, priests, and conquerors belonging to this race. A sign gave witness to the presence of glory: victory. The glory was attributed to solar origins, since the sun was regarded as the symbol of a luminous entity that triumphed every morning over darkness. By transferring these concepts *sub specie interioritatis,* the glory expressed the achievements of victorious races, in whom superiority was power (victory) and power superiority, as in the solar and immortal heavenly beings. In the *Yasht* it is written not only that the plant of haoma (of Dionysian states) grows on the mountains, but also that the mightiest mountain, Ushi-darena, is the seat of the Aryan glory.

As I said before, the mountain was also thought of as Walhalla. The word *Walhalla* has been popularized by Richard Wagner's operas, which in several instances adopt a literal interpretation of the ancient Nordic-Scandinavian views of the *Edda*, from which Wagner drew most of his inspiration. Such views, however, are open to deeper interpretations. Walhalla literally meant "the court of the fallen heroes," the king of which is Odin. This expresses the notion of a privileged seat of immortality (in these traditions, just as in the Greek ones, most people are destined to lead after death a dark and larval existence in the Niflheim, the Nordic equivalent of Hades), which is reserved for the nobility and the heroes who die on the battlefield. Almost according to the saying, "The blood of heroes is more precious to God than the ink of philosophers and the prayers of the faithful," in these ancient traditions, dying on a battlefield was the sacrifice most cherished by the highest deity (Odin, Wotan, or Tiuz) and the most fruitful of all superhuman feats. Odin transformed the fallen soldiers into his sons and made them immortal, together with the deified kings, in Walhalla. This seat was often associated with Asgard, the city of the Asen, the divine luminous beings engaged in a perennial struggle against the dark creatures of the earth *(elementarwesen).*

The concepts of Walhalla and Asgard originally enjoyed an immediate relationship with the mountain, so much so that Walhalla became the name of Swedish and other Scandinavian mountains. Moreover, when it was thought to be located on ancient mountains, such as Helgafell, Krossholar, and Hlidskjalf, Walhalla was thought to be the seat of heroes and of deified rulers. Asgard is often referred to in the *Edda* as Glitmirbjorg, the "shiny mountain" or as Himinbjorg, in which the ideas of mountain and of luminous sky, or of a luminous, heavenly quality, are fused together. Thus we still find the central theme of Asgard as a very high mountain, on the icy top of which an eternal brightness shines forth above the clouds and fog.

When Walhalla is thought of as a mountain, it is the place from which the so-called Wildes Heer departs and to which it returns. This is an ancient popular Nordic idea that was formulated at a higher level when it was associated with the army led by Odin, an army made up of fallen heroes. According to this tradition, the heroic sacrifice of one's life (which in the Roman tradition was called *mors triumphalis* and through which the victorious initiate joined the ranks of heroes and victorious soldiers) added a new recruit to that irresistible spiritual army, the Wildes Heer, which Odin, the god of battles, needed for an ultimate and transcendent goal: to fight against the *ragna rokkr,* namely, the destined twilight of the divine that lurked over the world from the distant past.

Through these traditions, assumed in their inner meaning rather than in their external mythological form, we arrive at the highest view of this cycle of myths concerning the divinity of the mountain, which is almost an echo of these distant realities. Seat of awakening, of heroism, and at times of a transfiguring heroic death; place of an enthusiasm leading toward transcendent states; place of a pure asceticism and of a triumphant solar force that opposes the powers that paralyze, obscure, and degrade life—these seem to comprise the ancients' symbolic perception of the mountain. This perception emerges in a cycle of legends and myths that are endowed with many similar characteristics, the above-mentioned examples of which are just a few among a vast array.

Naturally, I do not suggest espousing anachronistic evocations of myths, and yet this is not merely a list of curious examples from history. Behind the myth and the symbol that are conditioned by time there is a spirit that may always live again and be expressed in new forms and in new actions: this is what really counts.

The best wish we can make for the new generations is that mountain climbing may not amount to a desecration of the mountain. Moreover, I sincerely hope that those deep sensations at the root of the ancients' mythological deification of the mountain may be increasingly reawakened and come to exercise an enlightening influence on those who, today, led in a confused way by the instinct to overcome the limitations inherent in the everyday commercial and mechanical life of the plains, climb rocks, crests, and walls surrounded by the sky and by the abyss, pressing on toward icy and bright peaks.

3

Spirituality of the Mountain

To talk about the spirituality of the mountain today is not easy, especially because in many cases it has become commonplace. Probably few eras before our own have heard so much talk about the "spirit"; the "spirit" and the "spiritual" have almost been turned into a sort of condiment used to spice all kinds of dishes. This generalization, however, is in stark contrast with the fact that the contemporary era truly lacks authentically transcendent principles and visions.

We should not regard most modern references to spirituality as positive phenomena, but rather as confused aspirations that have no value unless they receive further development in a true orientation, in the sense of a firm self-consciousness, as a result of contact with some higher reality. At this point I would like to present my thoughts concerning mountains and alpine sports, and discuss the potential for the true spirituality they contain.

First of all, this potential is real and it does not have anything to do with the fashion trends of our era or with the short-lived enthusiasm of the younger generations; we know this because the spirituality of the mountain is traditional in the highest, strictest, and most universally understood sense of the word. I have gathered specific proof in an attempt to demonstrate that, since the oldest times, in almost every civilization, the mountain was uniformly regarded as the symbol of inner and transcendent states of being and as the allegorical seat of divine natures, of heroes, and of transfigured beings who had been taken beyond the mere human condition. According to various myths, climbing the mountains or being spirited to the peaks symbolized a mysterious transcendent process, a spiritual integration, and a participation in an Olympian immortality. To those who do not agree with the falsifying interpretation of the materialistic and rationalistic nineteenth century, according to which the ancient myths were nothing but poetry and arbitrary fancies, all this assumes the value of a specific testimony, the most hidden meaning of which needs to be investigated. All these ancient tales—in which recur the theme of the sacredness of the mountain—should be regarded by those people as hints of a spiritual reality, the connection of which with the symbolism of the mountain cannot be accidental. Ancient men did not casually choose the mountain as a means to express meanings that are clearly transcendent. Rather, they were induced to adopt the mountain as a symbol because of the analogy, or better, because of the foreboding that the experience of the mountain caused in the deepest recesses of their being, provided this experience is adequately cultivated.

To further analyze what the mountain symbolizes, it is first necessary to reject all the contemporary interpretations of the spirituality of the mountain and of mountain climbing. In other words, it is necessary to limit its scope to subordinate its various conditioned points of view to one absolute point of view.

The first of the current assumptions is the purely lyrical view of the mountain. I am referring to the world of literary rhetoric and poetry of the worst kind that consists of bourgeois sentimentalism and conventional and stereotypical idealism. From this perspective, the mountain is seen as part of the landscape, from a distance, and is represented as "picturesque." Poets describe the mountain in brilliant and exhilarating terms that lack serious content and do not express a sincere and direct experience. The mountain man and the true mountain climber do not share in this rhetoric. This rhetoric, which is confined to the aesthetic world of books, is fortunately no longer fashionable, since it is now seen as the residue of nineteenth-century romanticism and as the compensation of a bourgeois generation that only yearned for the snowy peaks through easy verbal enthusiasm and for common places through verbal lyricism.

Second, we find the spirituality of the mountain conceived in terms of naturalism. This is the view of a generation characterized by an opposite sentiment to that which I have just described; this generation may be characterized as "the generation of the crisis," which, by and large, is a German product. Out of an obscure need for an organic, biological, and even psychic compensation, and out of an instinctive revolt against a civilization that had become synonymous with dry intellectualism, with mechanical forces, with utilitarianism, and with conformism, what has occurred is an exodus toward nature and the emergence of an absolute need for the mountain to represent that which is anticity and anticulture. Thus, what has arisen is a new primitivist mysticism in regard to nature and the sports practiced in nature. This new primitivism takes up again most of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's ideas and the same indictment of civilization that was promoted by people like Nordau, Freud, Lessing, Bergmann, and Klanges.

In regard to this phenomenon, it is important to avoid misunderstandings. Obviously, there is nothing wrong with the idea that people need to rest, relax, and derive new strength from contact with nature and the mountain. Indeed, this is desirable; therefore mountain sports assume a role of social renovation of unquestionable value. And yet, we should not confuse what are very distinct realities and conclude that more or less physical sensations of well-being and organic refreshment have something to do with spirituality; nor should we believe that a man immersed in a climate of primitivist and naturalist practice is any closer to the essential part of his own being than when he is involved in the disciplines and the struggles of civilized life. Escapism, the reaction that accompanies it, and this exaltation of nature, in most cases are enough—due to their negative characteristics—to limit the scope of naturalism. The plane on which the spiritual personality may realize or strengthen its sense of itself is beyond both civilization (in the limited, materialistic, social, and intellectualist senses the term has assumed in recent times) and anticivilization, which is namely "nature" understood as a mere antithesis to civilized society. This is the plane I am talking about, not that of the conditions and the best ways to repair or preserve bodies and brains that have been negatively affected by the material and psychic poisons of modern life.

Third, it is necessary to overcome the attitude that holds the spirituality of the mountain and of mountain climbing in terms of mere sensations of physical heroism; this is the attitude of the elite who practice climbing seriously and actively. The mountain is spirit in all that it involves: discipline of the nerves and body, clear-minded courage, desire for conquest, and the impulse to engage in pure action in an environment of pure forces. Now, anything that contains a highly educational value deserves to be further qualified. Such a qualification concerns once again the finalities. Just as naturalism has its reasons for being at a certain plane, likewise mountain climbing has its own reasons for serving as a school for the previously mentioned qualities. It is undoubtedly desirable that the younger generations become capable of that spirit of boldness and of that psychophysical fitness that results from the active pursuit of mountain climbing. But is this the highest level to which they may aspire?

When we examine the inner aspect of this issue, that is, leaving out of consideration qualities of the younger generations that can and should be appreciated (such as health, energy, and self-discipline), we cannot help but notice the presence among our young people, of love for risk and even of heroism. Quite often the value of these qualities amounts to a mere sensation and their end result is the exasperating view of personality and virility as purely physical, hard, and closed. This modern view is already abnormally developed and it certainly does not constitute the best condition for the reattainment of a true, liberated, and transcendent spirituality. It must be recognized that mountain climbing, when experienced only in keeping with this view, would not be easily distinguished from the pursuit of emotions for their own sake. This pursuit of radical sensations generates, especially in the United States, all kinds of extravagant and desperate feats and bold acrobatic activities, such as jumping in midair from one plane to another, daredevil stunts, extreme sports, and so on. All things considered, these things do not differ very much from other excitements or drugs, the employment of which suggests the absence rather than the presence of a true sense of personality, and also the need to be stunned rather than to possess oneself. Even the technical component in mountain climbing may easily degenerate; we often find climbers who are automatically inclined, out of habit, to engage in all kinds of ascents, including that of skyscrapers.

However, it is certain that if there is an element that is open to understanding a superior realization in the experience of the mountain, it is the emotional or sensory element; and yet it is essential to see in that only a starting point, the raw material, and to consider sensory experience as only a means and not as an end in itself.

Modern man has a totally wrong attitude in regard to what he feels. Sensation is to him something that begins and ends in itself and in relation to which he is passive. He is too weak to separate from a sensation or an emotion the purely irrational element, or that which in this sensation is merely an impression or an inner turmoil. He is incapable of deriving from it, with an inner action, something that may be used directly and actively by the spirit as superior knowledge.

This is also the case of the experience of the mountain. Those who are irresistibly attracted to the mountains have often only experienced in an emotion a greatness that is beyond their understanding. They have not learned to master a new inner state emerging from the deepest recesses of their beings. Thus, they do not know why they seek increasingly wider horizons, freer skies, tougher peaks; or why, from peak to peak, from wall to wall, and from danger to danger, through their experiences they have become inexplicably disillusioned with everything that, in their ordinary lives, appeared to them as most lively, important, and exciting. That which appeals to them and moves them is the powerful inner message that is directly evident in everything in the mountains. The mountain can be destructive and is awesome in its greatness, its solitude, its inaccessibility, its silence, the primordial nature of its storms, its immutability through the succession of seasons and the constant formation and dissolution of the cloud banks—all these things should be regarded as intimations of immortality.

Thus, the mountain could serve as a symbol, and as such it could lead to a corresponding inner realization. More often than not, man stops at the emotional level, which usually has a perturbing quality rather than a feeling of conquest and special knowledge. The irrationality of impressions, visions, of inexplicable elan, and gratuitous acts of heroism urge man forward along ascending paths; thus, he eventually begins to act from an interior motive. It is in the context of the subconscious that he finds himself introduced to a wider reality through which he is transformed to a state of calmness, self-sufficiency, simplicity, purity. Moreover, he receives an almost supernatural inflow of energies that cannot be explained through the determinism of physiology. He also feels an indomitable will to keep on going, to commit himself again, to challenge new peaks, new abysses, new faces. It is precisely in this drive that we find inadequate the translation of the material action in regard to its meaning (the transcendence of the spiritual impulse in relation to external conditions), to the deeds, the visions, and the bold actions that have propagated its awakening and that still constitute the necessary material for the concrete expression of that very drive.

I do not think it is hasty to conclude that this determination must have been the secret behind the greatest mountain feats ever performed, those feats that seem to have really transcended the limits of ordinary human possibilities. And yet this level of accomplishment should be accompanied by true realization, by overcoming the instinctive and irrational element, and by a full and unwavering self-awareness, namely, the transformation of the experience of the mountain into a way of being. Then what would arise in the best subjects is the feeling that every mountain excursion, every climb, every conquest, and every daring feat are only means through which he expresses an immaterial reality that he could also express in other ways. This then is the strength of those who may be said to never return from the peaks to the plains. This is the strength of those for whom there is no longer going out or coming back because the mountain is in their spirit, because the symbol has become reality, and because all dross has been shed. For these people the mountain is no longer a new adventure or a romantic escape or a sensory high, or heroism for its own sake or a sport carried to new technical heights. Rather the mountain is connected to something that has no beginning and no end and that, having become an inalienable spiritual conquest, has become part of one's nature, something one carries everywhere that bestows a new meaning to every action, every experience, and every struggle in everyday life.

In this way, beyond the natural symbol of the mountain, which is directly perceived by the senses, we can access its doctrinal and traditional symbolism, namely, the deeper content of all the previously mentioned ancient myths in which the mountain appears as the seat of divine natures, immortalizing substances, forces of a solar and supernatural regality (for example, the solar mountain referred to in the traditions of the Hellenized

Roman Empire and the mountain as the seat of Mazdean glory), a spiritual center (Mount Meru and the other symbolic mountains conceived as poles), and so forth. In fact, in all this we see the various depictions, personifications, and projections of transcendent states of consciousness, of inner awakenings and enlightenments. These projections are said to be real when they no longer represent something vague, mystical, or fantastic, but rather when they are perceived according to the evidence and normalcy of a superior order that regards as abnormal everything that was previously regarded as familiar and habitual.

It is possible that the ancients, who ignored mountain climbing or only knew some rudimentary techniques (and therefore knew the mountain as an inaccessible and inviolable entity), were consequently led to experience it as a symbol and as a transcendent spirituality. Considering that today the mountain has been physically conquered and that there are few peaks that man has not yet reached, it is important to keep the conquest from being debased and from losing its higher meaning. Thus, it is necessary that the younger generations gradually come to appreciate action at the level of ritual and that they slowly succeed in finding again a transcendent reference point. It is through this reference point that the feats of audacity, risk, and conquest as well as the disciplines of the body, the senses, and the will that are practiced in the immovable, great, and symbolic mountain peaks, lead men to the realization that all in man is beyond himself. In this way these feats will be justified in the context of the spiritual revolutionary movement that is currently emerging among our people.

4

A Mystic of the Tibetan Mountains

Milarepa was a strange Tibetan ascetic and poet who lived around the eleventh century A.D. He is credited with a revival of the metaphysical doctrine of Northern Buddhism, or Mahayana, in the form of a tradition that has been transmitted orally up to our time. His teachings are known in the form of songs that include descriptions of some episodes of his life. I believe my readers will find it interesting to briefly explore this mysticism, in which the impressions made by high mountains, the struggle with the elements, various symbols, doctrines, and the allusion to enigmatic phenomena of a supernatural type are intimately interconnected. I will first summarize the narrative parts of Milarepa's poems.

Six months had gone by since the ascetic Milarepa, having taken to the high mountains near the great glaciers, had been caught with little food in a snowstorm that had isolated the mountain peaks from the rest of the world. Believing that Milarepa had died, his disciples made the sacrificial offerings prescribed for the dead. At the beginning of spring they went to look for him, forging a path through the snow, wishing to retrieve the body of their teacher.

During one stop in the glaciers a snow leopard appeared to them. They began to follow it when suddenly, to their astonishment, it turned into a tiger. At the entrance of the Cave of the Demons, they heard a voice singing a song, which they recognized as Milarepa's, and immediately ran inside to embrace their teacher; it was he who had projected the images of the leopard and the tiger through a far-reaching illusion, having sensed his approaching disciples.

He told them how, during his contemplation, although eating almost nothing, he had not felt the need for food; that during the feast days, the aerial spirits of the peaks had brought to him the essence of the offerings made to him by his friends; and that when his disciples, believing Milarepa to have died, had begun to make offerings, these became for him a sort of food that made him feel satiated and he wanted nothing.

At his disciples' request, Milarepa agreed to suspend his ascetic practices in the mountains and descend to the plateau, where, at the news of his safe return, a rejoicing crowd gathered. Milarepa, questioned by the people, told the story of his stay on the mountain peak and how he was able to endure the elements, the icy temperatures, and the raging wind, thus overcoming the invisible forces (the "demons") disguised as snow. Then he offered his teachings.

The Song of the Snow

At the end of the Tiger Year, before the Rabbit Year began, on the sixth day of Wa Jal, *a sense of renunciation grew within me.*
To the remote Lashi snow mountain came Milarepa, the anchorite who clings to solitude.
Heaven and earth held a council; a wind that tears the skin was sent.
The rivers ran and torrents surged; black clouds swept in from all directions.
The sun and the moon were shut in darkness and the twenty-eight constellations were fixed in place; the Milky Way was pegged-down and the eight planets were tied by an iron chain.
The firmament was wrapped in fog; in the mist, snow fell for nine days and nights. Then more and more for a further eighteen nights and days.
The snow fell, big as bags of wool, fell like birds flying in the sky, fell like a whirling swarm of bees.
Flakes fell small as a spindle's wheel, fell as tiny as bean seed, fell like tufts of cotton.

The snowfall was beyond all measure. Snow covered the whole mountain and even touched the sky, falling through the bushes and weighing down the trees.
In this great disaster I remained in utter solitude.
The snow, the wintry blast, and my thin cotton garment fought against each other on the white mountain. The snow, as it fell on me, turned into drizzle. I conquered the raging winds, subduing them to silent rest.
The cotton cloth I wore was like a burning brand.
The struggle was of life and death, as when giants wrestle and sabers clash.
I, the competent yogi, was victorious; my power over the vital heat (tumo) *and the two channels was thus shown.*
By observing carefully the Four Ills caused by meditation and keeping to the inner practice, the cold and the warm pranas *became the essence. This was why the raging wind grew tame and the storm, subdued, lost its power.*
Not even the devas' army could compete with me. This battle, I, the yogi, won.
Son of a lion, of all beasts the king, I have ever lived in snow mountains: no need to worry about me.
If you believe what this old man tells, Dharma will grow and spread afar.

The Song of Joy

In answer to my disciples' questioning, this is the happy song the old man sings! The falling snow enclosed my house of meditation; goddesses gave me food and sustenance.
By observing my own mind, all things are seen; by sitting in a lowly place, the royal throne is reached.
I, Milarepa, came to the Lashi Snow Mountain to occupy alone the Cave of the Demons. For six full months, the experiences of meditation grew. I now disclose them in this, the song of the Six Essences of Meditative Experiences.

Doctrine

If there be obstacles, it cannot be called space; if there be numbers, it cannot be called stars.
One cannot say, "This is a mountain," if it moves and shakes.
It cannot be an ocean should it grow or shrink.
One cannot be called a swimmer if he needs a bridge.
It is not a rainbow if it can be grasped.
These are the Six Outer Parables.

The limits of the definite restrict understanding.
Drowsiness and distractions are not meditation.
Acceptance and rejection are not acts of will.
A constant flow of thought is not yoga.
If there be East and West, it is not wisdom.
If birth and death, it is not Buddha.
These are the Six Inner Faults.

Great faith; reliance on a wise and strict guru; good discipline, solitude in hermitage; determined, persevering practice; and meditation—these are the Six Ways that lead to liberation.

The original inborn wisdom is the sphere of primordial depth. Without exterior or interior is the sphere of awareness; without brightness or darkness is the sphere of insight; omnipresent and all-embracing is the sphere of Dharma; without mutation or transition is the sphere of tig Le; *without interruption is the sphere of experience.*
These are the Six Unshakable Realms of Essence.
I sing this song of Six Essences of my experiences last winter while meditating.

The anguish of the heart that considers real that which has conditioned existence is overcome; the darkness of the illusion generated by lack of knowledge is dissolved.
The white lotus of the intellectual vision opens up; the torch of a clear self-consciousness is lit; wisdom awakens.
Is my spirit really awake?

When I look up to the blue sky, the emptiness of what exists is clearly evident to me and I do not fear the doctrine of the reality of things.
When I look at the sun and the moon, enlightenment arises in a distinct manner within my consciousness and I do not fear spiritual dullness and torpor.
When I look to the mountain peaks, the immutable object of contemplation is clearly perceived by my consciousness and I do not fear the unceasing changes of mere theories.
When I look down to the river below, the idea of continuity clearly arises in my consciousness, thus I do not fear unforeseeable events.
When I see the rainbow, the emptiness of phenomena is experienced in the most central part of my inner being and I fear neither that which endures, nor that which passes away.
When I see the image of the moon reflected by the water, self-liberation, freed from all concerns, clearly appears to my consciousness and I do not fear stupidity and frivolity.

The Song of the Essence of Things

The storm, the thunder, the clouds from the south. When they arise, they arise from the sky; when they disappear they do so into the sky.
The rainbow, the fog, and the mist. When they arise, they arise from the air; when they disappear they do so into the air.
The substance of all fruits and of every crop comes from the earth; when it disappears it does so into the earth.
Rivers, waves, and sea foam. When they arise, they arise from the ocean; when they disappear they do so into the ocean.
Passions, yearning, and greed. When they arise, they arise from the mind; when they disappear they do so into the mind.
Wisdom, enlightenment, liberation. When they arise, they

arise from the mind; when they disappear, they do so into the mind.

The freedom from rebirth, the unconditioned, the ineffable, when they arise, they arise from being; when they disappear, they do so into being.

That which is regarded as a demon, when it arises, it arises from within the ascetic; when it disappears, it does so into the ascetic, since these apparitions are only an illusory game of the inner essence.

By realizing the true nature of the mind, it is possible to realize that the state of enlightenment does not come, nor does it leave.

When the mind, which is deluded by the apparition of the external world, has finally understood the teaching concerning the phenomena, it experiences that there is no difference whatsoever between phenomena and emptiness. When the true nature of the mind is compared to that of ether, the essence of truth is properly understood.

5

Race and the Mountain

According to the main tenet of the doctrine of race, the qualities of a race are essentially hereditary factors. The environment exercises its influence but is not a decisive factor, since by itself it cannot generate permanent modifications that will be passed on as new legacies. Nevertheless, the environment assumes a special importance wherever there are types containing different hereditary factors due to previous racial inter-breeding. In these cases, the environment may act in such a way as to encourage the development of some of these factors instead of others, which may be inhibited or reduced to a latent state. On this basis, the environment is a factor that should be carefully considered wherever the question of trait-selection arises. A certain environment may test the variety of inherited dispositions and measure their strength; it may cause a discrimination; and it may even isolate and stabilize a predominant type when it presents the same conditions for a sufficiently long time.

The above-mentioned passing remarks are meant to constitute a general premise for some considerations I intend to present. These considerations concern the meaning the experience of the mountain has for an active view of the race, namely, the view that intends to give a greater emphasis, in the Italian people, to the qualities and gifts of the Aryan-Roman type.

I have said "experience of the mountain" and not simply "the mountain" because I am not referring to the people who inhabit the alpine areas. In this context I would like to address the effect of the experience and of the habit of the mountain on those who do not belong to this environment, and to whom the mountain represents an opportunity to react against the dull pace of everyday life.

Moreover, I do not intend to write about the physiological and psychological effects of mountain climbing, the beneficial and reintegrating aspect of which is common knowledge. Rather, I wish to focus on the aspect of trait selection and of character formation.

First, anybody who agrees with the predominant view according to which the original stock of the conquering Aryan race became differentiated from other peoples and asserted itself in the events and in the particularly harsh environment of the end of the glacial age will also acknowledge that, if there is a natural environment that might encourage the emergence of an analogous inner form, this is the mountainous environment—especially those areas where great glaciers and high peaks are to be found. In this case, the evocation of a primordial legacy may unfold under the right conditions, without imposing a priori an organic acclimatization on those who, after millennia spent away from the ancestors' homeland, attempted to derive positive experiences from a prolonged experience of the arctic regions.

Second, by virtue of its primordial nature, its elements, its distance from the petty world of the thoughts and feelings of the domesticated and rationalistic modern man, the mountain also invites people, in a spiritual way, to return to their origins, to the inner realization of something that reflects the simplicity, the greatness, the pure force, and the untouchability of the world of the icy and bright peaks. The fact that almost every ancient tradition knew the symbolism of the mountain—conceiving the mountain peaks as the seat of either divine and Olympian forces, or of heroes and transfigured men—confirms the evocative power I have just attributed to the mountain. It is necessary to emphasize this point: talking about a return to the origins and reconstructing human types, forms of civilization, and styles of ancient times is always going to amount to mere intellectualism and to a sterile nostalgia, unless one achieves a direct sense of what is primordial. Only nature can help in this task. I mean nature in whose aspects no room is left for what is beautiful, romantic, picturesque; I mean when nature ceases to speak to man; I mean nature that is substantiated by greatness and pure forces. Therefore, I would not refrain from saying that he who has conquered the mountain, namely, he who has learned to adapt himself to its fundamental meaning, already possesses a key to comprehending the original spirit and the spirit of the Aryan-Roman world in its most severe, pure, and monumental aspects. Such a key is not to be found in ordinary culture and scholarship.

Now I wish to discuss four elements of form. All those who are serious about mountain climbing, who climb ridges, walls, overhanging rocks, icy pathways, and narrow ledges, embody a common way of being. The main features of which resemble the features that were typically exemplified by the Aryan-Roman and Aryan-Nordic races and are also very different from those of a certain "Mediterranean" human type. In all this I am inclined to see the effect of a natural selection, and almost of a renewal, which occurs as the result of specific tasks, trials, and also a special environment.

The first characteristic is sparsity of words and reduced verbal communication. The mountain teaches silence; it discourages idle chatter, useless words, and exuberant and pointless effusive outbursts. It promotes simplification and the turning of one's attention inward. In an alpine environment, gestures and signals are more eloquent than long speeches. This is especially true when one is busy climbing, or making holes on the mountain's face, or crossing ravines; in these circumstances one instinctively adopts a military style and a terseness in warning, giving instructions, or confirming. This style can be extended from climbing to life in the mountains in general. It is true that sometimes one encounters relapses, especially among young people who do not shun noise and exuberance when staying at mountain shelters. And yet these relapses do not affect the essential, and have the value of juxtaposing this attitude with that found among true climbers and more qualified people, to whom the mountain is much more than a sporadic adventure and a fleeting emotion.

The second feature of serious mountain climbers, which is immediately connected to the first, is inner discipline: a total control of reflexes; the style of a deliberate, lucid, and purposeful action; a boldness that is not reckless or hasty, but which is connected to the knowledge of one's limitations and strengths and of the exact terms of the problems to be solved. In relation to this characteristic, we also find yet another one: the control of one's imagination and the capability to immediately neutralize any useless and harmful inner turmoil. These elements have much in common with the traits of ascetics, but here they are put into practice as the presuppositions of any relevant climbing excursion. A lucid concentration, fit for the purpose, this is yet another trait that the experience of the mountain awakens and stabilizes, until it transforms it in many people into a natural way of being or into some kind of habit. He who, when walking across an open icy ridge, thinks about something other than the next foot-step; or he who, during a climb, allows himself to think about the danger and the void yawning beneath him, instead of fixing his mind on the rapid and exact solution to the various questions of weight, equilibrium, and the right grip—such a person will hardly return a second time to the mountain, even if he still yearns for adventure. To return to the mountain; to face and to love the risks; to master the proper technique—all this means to give to one's being a certain form, which in some people eventually influences everyday, ordinary behavior. The active realism—that lucid and perfectly mastered instinct, that style of a spirit that keeps the soul and any irrational reaction under total control, are also the main characteristics of the Aryan-Nordic and Aryan-Roman style. It is true that analogous traits can also be developed in other sports, yet the experience of the mountain contains a number of elements that lead to their spiritualization, thus eliminating the danger of mechanization befalling those who have become a bundle of well-controlled reflexes.

Third, the experience of the mountain empowers one to act, to perform without spectators, and to display a heroism that shuns rhetoric and grandiose gestures. Again, it is the environment itself that brings about this purification of action, the overcoming of vanity, and an active disinterest. While the "Mediterranean type" is characterized by the need for a public and by the inclination to behave in a theatrical manner, the experience of the mountain is one of the best antidotes against this Mediterranean component that may remain in our Italian souls. Those who really practice mountain climbing learn an opposite joy to that of the Mediterranean type, namely the joy of being alone, of being left to one's self amid the changelessness of things, alone with one's action and contemplation. The fact that in the great majority of alpine feats people are roped to each other does not contradict the above-mentioned point, because there is no serious climber who at some point did not tackle the mountain alone. The other people he is roped with are never an audience; they are elements of a single unit who perform different tasks in the course of a common action. Everybody knows that a person in a roped party is expected to do much more than if he were alone, considering the consequences that an imprudent action or a weakness could have for others.

This leads me to consider a fourth characteristic, which I refer to as a special way of being and of acting together. Camaraderie, in this context, is too generic an expression. Here the connection is more individual and personal. Sentiment and affection play more minor roles than in the generic cases of camaraderie, yet with the effect of greater intensity. Another way to put it is to be simultaneously alone and with other people—a connection occurring essentially through action. To lead and show the way is just an example of the tasks that must always be fulfilled through strength. Maybe only some forms of camaraderie, forged during wartime on the battlefield, may bring about, like the experience of the mountain, this special sense of active solidarity, which keeps a distance between people and yet presupposes the full harmony of their forces because of the precise assessment of and trust in each member's potential.

This is virility without ostentation and mutual help without hesitation, among people who are on the same plane; it is based on a freely chosen and common goal.

Thus, this latter element, when compared to it, reminds us of the type of community that was one of the most characteristic elements of the ancient Aryan races and the Aryan-Roman people; this type of community had nothing to do with socialism. Its foundation was neither a collective entity nor individualism, but rather personality. Its law was action; in it there were relationships of real men, cemented by trust, loyalty and truthfulness, not to mention the shared dignity of belonging to the same race. Subordination did not humiliate people in this type of society, because of the precise vision of the whole and because of the vision shared by each individual.

These are the main elements that, through the natural selection of the environment and by the test of action, are most cherished by those who take the mountain experience seriously. These people, with a significant degree of uniformity, tend to rectify or neutralize other inclinations and qualities that are emphasized in life on the plains and in the great cities. Nothing is created out of nothing; thus, the present considerations do not apply to the completely bastardized modern man who has been reduced to a working and sporting animal. These considerations apply instead to those in whom the sense of race (race in a spiritual, higher sense) still means something and, rather, represents the main departing point for a will oriented toward liberation and awakening. In these people, the mountainous milieu awakens a primordial legacy and possibly contributes to the gradual emergence of a transcendent sense of freedom—which does not signify escapism, but is instead a principle of pure strength. This sense of freedom finds its most perfect expression within one's limited self, in concentration, in a deliberate action, in the complete, lucid dominion of the irrational part of the human being, and finally, in the readiness to be freely transformed into an element of solid action, in which the goal is located above everybody and everything else.

6

The Mountain, Sport, and Contemplation

In a recent publication of the Italian Mountain Association, I came across a polemic. Far from wanting to fuel this quarrel, I intend to make some general comments that will serve as a reference point for my readers.

The quarrel is about the meaning of true mountain climbing. Carlo Anguissola d'Emet has taken a position against an overly technical approach to climbing, which he characterizes as follows:

> A real climber cannot be somebody who does not love, understand, and pursue the fifth or sixth degree. A climber is someone who carries ropes, nails, hooks, shoes, snaplinks, sleeping bag, and a lot of equipment during his excursions. A climber is one who has repeatedly bivouacked on the walls, connected to nails, [and] slept in the open under the rain or during a storm, waiting for the break of dawn.

Anguissola deplores that in the periodicals devoted to mountain climbing this technical approach is increasingly predominant, so much so that the only things that matter these days are degrees of difficulty or this or that school of mountain climbing. Moreover, he complains that it is possible to notice an increasingly snobbish attitude in young people, who display colorful sweaters, pipes in their mouths, and big patches from various ski or climbing schools, all the while flaunting technical jargon.

Anguissola definitely admits the "usefulness of certain notions of climbing," yet claims that the casualty of the overemphasis on technique is the qualitative aspect of mountain climbing. Worse yet, the latter's spontaneous, original, and sincere character is suffocated. The result is the diminution of the contemplation of and direct contact with one of the most grandiose forms of nature. The American passion for records seems to have become a predominant concern. It seems that the true climber is one who taunts those who love the mountain in all of its forms, whether they be high peaks, such as Mount Cervino or Mount Lavaredo, or plateaus. True mountain lovers, while being experienced climbers, still give priority to the contemplative interest and the impulse to establish contact with a world that helps one forget the mechanical and dull life of the modern cities.

Anguissola was rebuffed by P. Marimonti on the pages of the same review. Marimonti claimed that such an argument is outdated and that the only thing that matters is "what is a great climbing feat, and in what manner it is carried out." He proceeded to quote the words of Emilio Comici:

> In order to really feel the power of the mountain, it is necessary to confront a wall of the fifth or sixth degree of difficulty. Those who have never tried it before cannot judge others who have. We do not go to the mountain just to practice a contemplative form of climbing. . . . This takes place only during days of rest, when, in contemplation, we dream of a beautiful and difficult feat.

According to Marimonti, these words of Comici's characterize the most complete form of mountain climbing, and he added: "Not all those who take to the mountain have the necessary qualities to understand it." In his view, the people who are closer to understanding the mountain are those who "attend with profit schools and courses of mountain climbing."

Thus, there seems to be a conflict of interpretations. To clarify matters, I would like to acknowledge and deplore, with Marimonti, the existence of relevant literature that "more often than not represents a rhetorical outburst rather than expressing true feelings." The mountain as an ideal place to induce sweet and poetic feelings, a place that delights people with beautiful sunsets and starry nights, belongs to an outdated generation that was infected with bourgeois sentimentalism and romanticism. The mountain itself appears to me to be the best antidote to similar deviations. In few of its manifestations does nature give us the sense of what, in its greatness, purity, power, and primordial nature, is far above the insignificant lives and artificial lyricism of ordinary people. In my view, such a catharsis, and such a removal of the I from the shallow world of mere subjectivity and its literary and psychological appendices, ought to be the first salutary effect derived from the practice of true mountain climbing, and also the reason why climbing in its essence ought to be regarded by the best elements as something more than mere sport.

Is this a matter of contemplation? Let me explain. This word has different meanings. The most current meaning is the one that has been profaned the most. According to it, *contemplation* signifies flights of fantasy and a passive abiding in the impressions and in the inner repercussions of spectacular views. Originally, *contemplation* referred to asceticism and signified something else altogether: it represented a sphere superior to "active life" (in some cases culminating in it), characterized by the overcoming of the ordinary and individual sense of one's self. The corresponding Greek term, *theoria,* implies a through-and-through inner realization or identification: consciousness that lives directly in its object. When we talk of catharsis, or of purification as an overcoming of that which is subjective, sentimental, and bourgeois thanks to the experience of the mountain, we can refer to this older and more austere meaning of the contemplative dimension.

At this point we ought to wonder, of all those who take to the mountain, how many possess the necessary qualities to understand, or better, to welcome the transforming power of the experience of the mountain? Moreover, we ought to wonder whether the ones closer to it are those who concentrate on the technical preparations and on the love of effort and risk, despising contemplative feelings (which, judging from the quoted words, amount to "dreaming of a beautiful and difficult conquest during times of rest"). The right perspective seems to me to fall above both extremes.

I believe that on the mountain contemplation and action ought to be two inseparable elements of an organic whole, outside of which they immediately lose their specific and higher meaning. In order to realize this, let us take the two terms separately and thus reach absurd conclusions. The limit of a contemplation without action can be realized on an airplane. Sitting comfortably in first class on the Venice-Munich or the Venice-Vienna route, flying several thousand feet above sea level, one might enjoy the magnificent and vast view of the Alps and the sky (especially in wintertime). This view would be much more beautiful than that available for contemplations (in the restricted sense of the word) that can be experienced from the highest peaks, climbed with much effort and concentration.

As far as action without contemplation is concerned, think about those acrobatic feats performed on a rope suspended between two skyscrapers, or on a trapeze, in which everything depends on the exact and flawless execution of a jump. I wonder if the schools of mountain climbing have truly much more to offer on the matter of discipline in the face of danger, control of one's reflexes, and technique. It is clear therefore, that the two things have their respective relative values: mountain climbing is an important and serious business—and educational in a superior and not only in a degraded and modern sense—only when it involves a special action that derives its meaning from contemplation and when it includes a special contemplation that derives its meaning from action.

It can hardly be disputed that the technical character of modern alpinism (which is most often based on the quest for new records, on increasing difficulties, on the wall that has never been attempted before, even when it is possible to get to the top through other ways), with its inevitable mechanical quality, often represents a regression in regard to the above-mentioned holistic approach. The spiritual lesson that the mountain has to offer those who climb, having been called and chosen by it, no school of fifth or sixth degree can offer. Quite frankly, repetition and experience inevitably lead to a dulling of sensibility—at least, this is what my own personal experience has taught me.

That which one learns from the peaks and glaciers by traveling alone, with a minimal knowledge of technique, becomes less of a learning experience after a routine has been established, after one has learned dangerous techniques and trained his mind to concentrate on the best solution to the next technical problem presented by the next step in the ice and by the next grip on the rock. This is a very helpful way for training oneself in a sportslike manner and for educating body and nerves, but it inevitably leads to the extinction of the spiritual experience of the mountain and also reduces the opportunities for catharsis that may be contained therein. Let us not confuse the issue by talking about the mountain as "a great school of courage, a school of climbing mountain men who specialize in great feats." Those feats are specializations: forms which of course have a high value, although only in their own limited fields. In this context the mountain appears merely as an *X* degree of difficulty, which has to be overcome through appropriate means in relation to a special form of action oriented to a *Y* goal, just like a military action. This very circumscribed context allows no room for considerations of a superior order.

It is also a fact that in recent generations there are evident symptoms of increasing materialism and mechanization in mountain climbing, which—especially in regard to the mania for records and the pursuit of difficulty for its own sake—is somewhat influenced by the American mentality and by its frivolous obsession with sports. Another danger—caused by other factors—is the "mass" phenomenon, that invades the mountains, which unavoidably brings a plebeian quality and causes the loss of spiritual quality, the level and value of the experience. Finally, there is a special snobbery, exemplified by those who act like new Trenkers,[1] with a mixture of false simplicity and ostentation.

And thus in the mountains, especially during the winter and summer seasons, there is no longer any room. It will be great luck if the best climbers are able to overcome the already mentioned limitations and find again in the mountains and the peaks the ways of a really wholesome experience, of some kind of silent ascesis and inner liberation.

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[1] Louis Trenker, born in Ortisei in 1892, was a movie director, cinematographer, and actor in German movies, although he retained his Austrian citizenship. He achieved his greatest notoriety in the 1930s starring in mountain-climbing roles.

7

Ascending and Descending

There is no significant upheaval in the world of culture, social phenomena, and, in general, collective sensibility, that is not capable of having a symbolic meaning and of pointing to an order of things that usually escapes a superficial observer.

The world of sports in this regard is far from representing an exception. Moreover, we may add that the very phenomenon of the growth and importance that sports have enjoyed in contemporary Western life is the barometric index of the shift, on the part of the Western soul, to a worldview that is very different from that of the previous bourgeois and intellectualist nineteenth century. It is superfluous, at this point, to emphasize the relationship between this upheaval and the action-oriented new political currents.

But even in the domain of the various sports, similar considerations have to be made. In this context, I wish to confine them to a circumscribed topic, namely, to the meaning of the immediate, general popularity that skiing has enjoyed, particularly compared to the meaning of another similar form of sport, namely, mountain climbing.

In order to prevent misunderstandings, I must specify the level to which my thoughts apply. First of all I would like to make it very clear that I have never had, nor will I ever have, anything against the practical value of skiing. I will gladly acknowledge everything that may be acquired from this sport in terms of health, bravery, physical and mental invigoration, and its refreshing effect upon our youth, whom the modern metropolitan life suffocates and oppresses. Let this be clear from the start; therefore, what I will say later on in no way should induce my readers to think that I deny such practical value to skiing as a sport. I also wish to add that I myself practice skiing as well as mountain climbing—obviously as a mere amateur—without being affected by the negative symbolic meaning, very revealing of our times, which this sport has come to assume.

Skiing has enjoyed a rapidly growing popularity considering that, as a sport, it is not even sixty years old. The first skiing competition was held in 1870 in Christiania, where the villagers of Telemark defeated their opponents by employing a special technique, causing a universal astonishment. Naturally, skis were previously known in Northern European countries as means for traveling through snow-covered areas; people thought of them as natural and useful tools, just as a boat that is employed to cross the waters. However, skiing as a sport that awakens a special passion and generates a certain pleasure has acquired a great popularity among the great European nations only in very recent times. In the aftermath of World War I it has won the hearts of the younger generation. Skiing's rapid success, its universal appeal, the genuine interest and enthusiasm it induces in both sexes are so characteristic that it would be superficial to see in it something merely casual. Rather, it is something that ought to be explained as that which precisely typifies the contemporary spirit.

Thus, we should inquire: what constitutes the essence of skiing? What is its nucleus, the point around which its other aspects revolve? The answer is easy: it is the descent.

Just as in elementary climbing, the fundamental element and the center of interest is ascending, likewise, in skiing this corresponds to descending. The dominant motif in mountain climbing is conquest. Once the peak is reached and the point beyond which one cannot go any further is attained, the phase most interesting to an ice or rock climber ends. In skiing, the opposite is true: the purpose of every ascent is descending. Hours of effort, which are necessary to reach a certain height, are spent only in order to be able to slide downhill. Thus, in more developed and modern winter resorts, the problem is solved in favor of the true interest of skiers through the construction of cables that carry them effortlessly to the top; after coming down they are ready to go up again, for as many rides as they wish. Just as climbing is characterized by the thrill of the ascent, likewise as a conquest, skiing is characterized by the thrill of the descent, by speed, and even by eventual falls.

This last point is not irrelevant. The relationship between the self and one's own body differs greatly between climbing and skiing. In climbing we find a direct sense of one's whole body. The forms emphasize equilibrium, elan, and effort, which presuppose mastery over the body—the lucid and calculated shift of all its weight in response to each challenge presented by the ascent, the grip, the reliability of the step carved in the ice. In skiing it is a different story: the relationship of the self and the body, which is connected to the skis and put at the mercy of the forces of gravity, may truly be compared to the relationship between somebody driving a car and the car itself, once it is moving at full speed. Once the skier has begun his race downhill, there is only one thing he can do: guide himself, using precise movements, by regulating speed and direction, and by developing a mastery of those reflexes that control the descent. This is like the case of a driver who enjoys driving at full speed in a road crowded with people and other cars, without slowing down, but acting with quick reflexes in order to avoid various obstacles or people, almost playing with them, and then moving on to other obstacles.

As far as the inner aspect of skiing is concerned, namely, concerning that which it has to offer to the spirit, it is necessary to remember one's impression of putting on skis for the very first time: one has the impression that the ground is slipping from underneath one's feet, or of falling. Such an impression surfaces again in more difficult forms of this sport, such as downhill racing and ski jumping. On this basis I do not think I am wrong to say that the deepest meaning of skiing consists of transforming the instinctive fear of falling, or the instinct of holding back or of stopping—which accompanies every fall—into a sensation of exhilaration, of pleasure, which makes one wish to go faster and play with speed. Paradoxical as it seems, skiing may be defined as the technique, game, and enjoyment of falling. In skiing we find a form of boldness, of courage (which for all practical purposes should not be despised), and yet it is a special form that is completely different from the boldness of a mountain climber and is likewise tied to antithetical meanings: it is an essentially modern form of boldness.

With the term falling, we describe the symbolic meaning of skiing and the deep reason for its growing popularity. Among the many varieties of sports, skiing should definitely be counted among those that least reflect classical values. This is why, while the ancient traditions of all people symbolically portray the mountain as the goal of ascents and of transfigurations (this despite almost total ignorance of climbing techniques), there is no reference in these traditions to skiing. The fact is that in skiing, the modern spirit finds itself essentially at home; this modern spirit is intoxicated with speed, with constant change, with acceleration. Until recently this intoxication was celebrated as the spirit of progress, despite the fact that, in many regards, it is nothing other than a collapsing and a falling down. This exhilarating motion, joined with a cerebral feeling of control over the direction of these forces hurled and no longer really mastered, is typical of the modern world, in which the self achieves its most intense self-awareness. As if through a reflection, I believe that values similar to those of climbing appear in skiing and characterize it in regard to climbing, as the physical translation of the opposite of ascending, elevating oneself, overcoming the forces of gravity.

Let me repeat that I myself practice skiing, although I am not disturbed or distracted by these ideas. One should not shun any experience. What matters is to maintain openness toward all experiences and thus be always aware lest physical and emotional elements attempt to exercise a seductive influence upon higher domains.

PART TWO

Experiences

8

The Northern Wall of Eastern Lyskamm

I think my readers will be interested in learning about my climb of the Eastern Lyskamm (4532 meters) by the northeastern wall, on August 29, 1930. It was not the first time this climb had been attempted; in 1890 the roped party of Norman Neruda, Klucker, and Reinstadler followed the rocky path of the mountain for almost the entire ascent. The second climb, the first ever to be attempted by Italians, was accomplished by Dr. Carlo Fortina with the mountain guide Augusto Welf from Gressoney. In 1926 two Germans climbed it without a guide; in 1927 the German W. Kehl climbed it with two guides. On August 26, 1929, the brave Italian female climber Ninī Pietrasanta, with the mountain guide Chiara from Alagna, performed the first all-women climb, thus winning a new record for Italian mountaineering. Two young men from Torino, Emanuele Andreis and Luigi Bon, during that same August, were the first Italians to climb it without a guide.

However, considering the importance of this mountain, the majesty of its northern side, the remarkably lucky circumstances under which our climb took place, and the straight path we followed, I wish to publish my notes.

My companion is Eugenio David, from Gressoney, one of the best young mountain guides from the Val d'Aosta. Tall, agile, calm, of a steadfastness equal to his courage, he is a painter and a musician and had once been a member of the elite Mountain Troops *(Alpini)*. He is the best companion for someone like me, who likes to climb the mountain alone or with as few people as possible, tackling the mountain at a fast pace, rather than conquering it at a slow and steady pace.

We set base camp at Capanna Gnifetti (3647 meters). The night had been stormy, marked by repeated lightning flashes and gusts of hail and snow. Even though everybody tried to discourage us, shortly before dawn, brandishing lanterns, we descend onto the glacier. Ignoring the difficulties, we resolve to achieve our goal and to make as much progress as possible. In the early light, the clouds appear to coagulate in the valleys below, revealing the bright white fresh snow and a clear sky of marine blue color. The peaks look majestic, forming a choirlike ensemble; behind them lay our intended objective, Mount Lyskamm. Before we reach Mount Lysjoch, the return of icy gusts of wind and of clouds, which arise from the southern valleys and envelope the peaks, cause us to stop and reflect on our next move. Considering the circumstances, David declares that attempting to go on is risky business. At first I do not try to persuade him to go on; since waiting has made us cold, I propose to him, as a *pis aller,* to cross the two Lyskamms using the ordinary path on which I had walked just two days earlier. By the time we reach the first slopes the horizon clears up again. My companion finds his original resolve again, following my joke about "the Girl Scout's walk" we are about to begin. After he replies, "OK, let's go!" we set off at a running pace toward Mount Lysjoch and go even farther, ending up at the foot of Mount Grenzgletscher, almost intoxicated by the thought of the adventure we have committed ourselves to.

It is six o'clock A.M. sharp when we reach the bottom of the mountain face. There are no more clouds or wind, there is only a bright light that is spreading slowly over the sky and the snow. Above our heads the icy slopes appear merciless, vertiginous, disconcerting. All around us, mountain peaks.

The bottom of the mountain wall is surrounded by a deep, permanent crevasse; today its edges are rather treacherous due to the very recent snowfall. We carefully circumnavigate it until we find a place to cross over. David descends into the crevasse, trusting an area covered with snow to hold his weight. He climbs the slope of the crevasse and makes it to the other side. Quickly, and without hesitating, I follow suit. Now it is time to begin our climb.

From the very start the incline is formidable: not less than sixty degrees. The ground, which is covered by clinging fresh snow to which the hook and the ice axe on which we lean for support can easily hold, allows us a short-lived hope. A little later we are discouraged to learn that the ground is covered only by a thin layer of snow that is insufficient to hold our weight but also thick enough to prevent our spiked soles from reaching the ice underneath and thereby from getting a firm hold. Farther on we encounter pure ice with a few areas covered by snow that had frozen over the night before.

We are in the middle of our adventure. We proceed. The rope becomes useless. It is also useless to think about reciprocal holds. We cannot plunge the ice axe into the ground, nor can we possibly lean on it, considering that the notches of the steps and the firmness of the natural holds are insufficient to hold even the lesser weight of the "vertical component" of an inclined body. Moreover, not only is it useless to attempt zigzagging to reduce the incline, but also dangerous, since to move a foot sideways between the almost vertical ice and the other foot, which is resting uncertainly, is a big risk. We have no other choice but to press onward independent of each other because if one of us fell he would certainly drag the other to a sure death. We thrust the ice axes upward with all our strength, trying to gain that minimal amount of safety and hold that will allow our agility to spare us digging a hole into the ice—this activity is truly challenging for our arms.

The view of the crevasse yawning beneath us, into which we could fall as a result of a minor mistake, has disappeared. We are alone in the middle of the uncompromising icy slope, left to our resources for better or for worse. Beyond the crevasse lies Mount Dufour, an imposing mountain marked by black, tough ridges. All around us a nonhuman silence; that lightness of the air that makes every perception acute; and these great, motionless, calm, and bright realities that make a strange contrast with our inner state of tension and our sensation of imminent danger. Just like our bodies, our souls too have little or no support. There is nothing varying or picturesque about our ascent; as a matter of fact it is as monotonous as a stone or a mountain stream. There is something almost closed, fierce, and relentless about it. This ascent requires pure strength and a pure, calm, and uncompromising will. Slowly but steadily, something arises in us: that automatic, almost supernatural state of security, lack of tiredness, and lucidity that arises at great heights and in the face of mortal danger, after one's initial strength and sensations have been depleted. We press onward, upward, with strong resolve, a strange calm and precision in our every move. Higher up, we can see the first rocks of the mountain rib, simultaneously close and far away, due to the deceiving perspective of the snows. We aim straight for them.

When we finally reach these rocks, our hands, quite frozen despite the heavy gloves, struggle to wrest a hold from the ice. The length of our ice axe embarrasses us; a small axe would have done the job. The vertical slope does not show any breaks, not even at this level; however, it is easier to deal with that than with the wall of ice that we encounter here and there in between rocks. We climb at a rapid pace, assaulting the rock, forgoing safety measures with the rope because we fear we have taken too much time already. All of a sudden, a rock on which I placed my foot, thinking it offered a steady hold, gives way; as it falls downward, I follow suit. It is almost a miracle that my ice axe stops my fall right away, even before I have time to warn David, who is in front of me. This was the only incident. Quite frankly, the fact that we did not experience any slides or losses of footholds in an adventure such as this one, conducted in the way that we did, seems to me to be more than a case of pure luck.

The mountain ribs are about to end. Our eyes, which very often turn upward, instinctively and questioningly, now contemplate a sort of cliff with seracs and stalactites touched by the sun light. To our left, fragments of ice fall from above every now and then, at frightening speed, barely touching the mountain wall, bouncing off, piercing the air with a noise resembling that of bullets. We better hurry up. We do not need to engage the seracs, since we can turn right and proceed where the cliff is less steep.

And finally, as we are approaching the top, bathed in sunlight, we pause to take a deep breath. Before us, the wall's inclination decreases rapidly to forty-five degrees or less. Better yet, it is covered by a layer of fresh, packed snow. Above us, the peak! The characteristic tripodlike shape of the Eastern Lyskamm is still there, clearly visible in the background straight ahead. We could not have aimed better at our intended target. David, who had studied our route from Mount Dufour, is proud and rightly so. We do not stop but press on at a rapid pace. Here and there are more slopes and hard ice, which we bypass without hesitation by following the contours of dark rocks; these slopes are easier on us than the previous ones.

At 11:30 A.M. we finally make it to the top. Our ascent has taken exactly five and a half hours; we are not unhappy about it, considering the difficult conditions of the mountain wall.

The daylight has become glorious and shiny. And now, after the action, contemplation ensues. It is time to enjoy the peaks and heights from our vantage point: where the view becomes circular and celestial, where petty concerns of ordinary people, of the meaningless struggles of the life of the plains, disappear; where nothing else exists but the sky and the free and powerful forces that reflect the titanic choir of the peaks. "Many meters above sea level, but many more above what is human!" wrote F. Nietzsche a long time ago.

Our journey back is uneventful. Since the condition of the snow prevents us from descending along the southwestern wall, on the right side of "the Nose" (as we had planned originally and which my friend David had attempted), cross the Lyskamm along its long side, turning to the left, following the ridge, heading toward Mount Lysjoch.

Two hours later we reach the mountain refuge, Gnifetti. We had left there, for our return, two very different and yet complementary things, a bottle of White Horse whiskey and a text of warrior asceticism, the *Bhagavadgita*.

9

Notes Concerning Psychic Training in the Mountains

Among the many strange things Alexandra David-Neel wrote about her thirteen-year-long stay on the Tibetan plateaus, on the peaks of the Himalayas, and on the Mongolian steppes, one in particular stands out.

She had been traveling for many days through a vast region of desert and mountains with her caravan, when, in the distance, she saw a small, black, moving dot. At first she thought it was an animal—which would have been odd considering the barren surroundings—but a while later she identified it as a man. She thought it must be a lost traveler, or the survivor of a destroyed caravan. Somebody from her party yelled out to the man. The man was getting closer and yet he did not attempt to reply, as if he had not noticed the voices or even David-Neel's caravan. They saw that he was almost running, taking great rhythmic and elastic steps (David-Neel compared the impression she received with that of cinematic slow motion), following a straight line, his head straight, staring ahead. He passed next to these people without taking notice of them and then went farther and farther away, keeping the same rhythm. From the caravan, somebody decided to follow him on horseback, until he saw the man climbing a steep slope, always following the same direction and retaining the same pace, until he disappeared among the cliffs.

David-Neel also relates that among the many possibilities cultivated by a civilization such as the Tibetan, which has focused for thousands of years on the study of the psychic dimension rather than on the physical dimension of people and things, there is that of inducing special mental states. During these states it is possible to eliminate tiredness and to travel for days and nights without any rest, with little or no food.

David-Neel also relates that these powers are developed in Tibet through special practices that are mostly aimed at obtaining mastery over one's breathing and mind. The mind must acquire the capability to develop an absolute concentration (symbols and formulas are sometimes employed to help the mind stay focused during such a forced march). After determining the goal to be achieved and its general direction in relation to the starting point, the subject enters into an extraordinary mental state, which cannot be characterized as mediumistic or trancelike because, rather than subconscious it is superconscious; in other words it is an active rather than a passive state. The only similarities with a trance are merely superficial, external traits. From that moment on, a person's inner strength is concentrated on the goal; in a way, the subject is separated both from other beings and from the external world, with the exception of the ground that is immediately before him. What sets in is a tireless and quick pace that remains unaltered whether on the plain or slope. Something else emerges, namely, a supernormal, instinctive, direct sense of orientation. Thus, without a break, these strange beings travel to the preestablished location, even if it is several days and nights away, almost as if they lived outside of time.

David-Neel's caravan had encountered one of these travelers in the middle of a plateau that was several days away from the closest inhabited center. She came to learn of other cases, both through personal experience and through word of mouth. The universally recognized seriousness of this writer and traveler demands that we believe that these are not made up stories or the fruits of her imagination. We have to agree with one of Shakespeare's sayings, according to which "There are in heaven and earth more things than what is contained in all human philosophy."

By mentioning this episode in this context, I am certainly not urging people to become Tibetan yogis and to devote themselves to practices of extraordinary psychic development. All things considered, these practices are not really suited for the mentality and physical constitution of a modern Western person; on the other hand, I do not mention this episode merely out of curiosity.

The fact is that, in regard to mountain climbing, there exist possibilities of inner training which, without being so extraordinary or dramatic as David-Neel's story, may lead those who cultivate them further than those who do not. These possibilities are not inaccessible. We may acknowledge that among serious climbers there are some who have developed these possibilities in a partial fashion, without being aware of it and without employing a specific method; indeed, these possibilities developed as the indirect result of a purely physical training conducted in special circumstances.

It is necessary to begin by acknowledging the mechanical character of sports training in general, notwithstanding some exceptions in whom it is almost always possible to detect the presence of a certain spiritual level. In this type of sports training, the relationship of the "self" with the body resembles the relationship a person may have with another person or an animal he intends to dominate and subject to his will. There is really no direct relationship between them; the self commands the body, through nerves and muscles, to perform certain movements or to make certain efforts. As a result, some reactions (for example, tiredness, pain, and so on) ensue; through repetition one attempts to eliminate these reactions and to gradually create in the body some automatic habits and dispositions that one did not previously have. Once this is accomplished, the body ceases to resist and suffer, and it obeys just as with ordinary movements, like a tamed animal. Thus, the desired level of training has been achieved.

However, in order to experience such possibilities, one must recognize a third element, of an intermediary nature (which is neither psychic nor merely corporeal) between the body and the self, which we may call vital force, or vital principle. Somehow, such an element has always been acknowledged in ancient traditions which, in this regard, had more complete views on man's nature than those elaborated by modern positivist science. This element is the foundation of the body's life; one of the functions with which it is most directly related is breathing.

It is possible to achieve a different type of training and control over the physical dimension by acting upon this vital force, by making action depend on it, instead of acting directly through nerves, muscles, and so on. The difficulty is in the fact that the vital force manifests itself on the plane of the body's subconscious and thus it cannot be immediately controlled (with the exception of some special and extraordinary cases—further on I will briefly mention the effect of great heights). However, the will can easily act upon the breath, and thus, due to the above-mentioned relationship between breath and vital force, it is possible to achieve the goal.

These are the premises. On their basis one can join a purely physical training with psychic training (or should I say psychophysical) in which what acts is not so much a group of muscles, more or less developed, but rather a direct spiritual force; thus we shall see that some limitations encountered in the first type of training can be overcome by applying the second type.

In specific regard to mountain climbs (by this term I do not mean acrobatic feats or the overcoming of vertical walls, but circumstances in which the climb, no matter how tough, always requires a certain continuous pace), we can distinguish between a common method and a method I characterize as an attack.

Considering that the power of the moral-psychic element over the physical dimension is sufficiently known, I will not emphasize it in this context: through inner resources and feelings of exaltation or enthusiasm, even weak and worn out bodies have proven, in countless cases, to be able to successfully overcome difficulties and to engage in the most incredible and strenuous efforts (in wartime there have been plenty of instances of this). Anybody who has practiced climbing may remember what a strange influx of new strength has sometimes occurred when, after feeling literally worn out by a storm and having almost reached a point of giving up, all of a sudden the place of and the way to safety are recognized; or when, after hours spent on the mountain face, feeling exhausted and uncertain about the way out, one finally sees the much yearned-for peak.

Psychology has given a name to this phenomenon: it is called the "second wind" (W. James). In this way we must recognize that, aside from the vital force, which is usually at work in the limbs and organs related to them, there is a deeper and greater reservoir that manifests itself only in exceptional circumstances, almost always under the influence of a psychological or emotional factor. Thus, the task consists of finding a method through which to tap into this hidden source of energy, the essence of which is, however, experienced instinctively, casually, and emotionally.

The first way to achieve such a goal is rather intuitive. First of all it is necessary to empty one's self and to be willing to exhaust, as quickly as possible, the amount of energy available to the body, until a critical level of exhaustion is reached. Then, what occurs is the phenomenon of the second wind, in which the vital energies in reserve are forced to emerge. Since they are not connected to the physical body, they are not limited; they can do much more than physical energies. Thus, one enters into a new rhythm and state of tirelessness.

And so, for all practical purposes, one can overthrow the habitual conduct among climbers of trying to avoid exhaustion by proceeding at a slow pace, by becoming fatigued as soon as possible, tackling the ascent offensively, just like those enthusiastic amateurs about whom expert climbers say, "In less than twenty minutes we will find them sitting down, breathless, waiting for us." He who knows begins the climb offensively and continues in this fashion: it is he who has to wait for others in huts or on tops of peaks, sometimes even for hours, without being breathless, better yet, without being nearly as tired as others.

The secret lies for the most part in the breath. It is necessary to get used to feeling one's breath, to immediately take control of it from the very first step, without ever letting go of it. Second, it is necessary to connect the rhythm of breathing to the pace of walking, without ever breaking this connection: inhale while taking a step, hold the breath in between steps, and exhale while making the next step with the other leg, and so forth. Due to the different inclines, when the climb is steeper one can regulate the walking pace and even slow it down; in the flatter areas one could even accelerate this pace, without ever breaking, for any reason, the correspondence between the rhythm of breathing and the pace of walking.

This technique has its equivalent in the habit cultivated by experienced climbers and mountain guides, who retain the same pace without ever stopping to catch their breath. The difference is that in the former case, this must be done in a conscious and controlled fashion and not in an automatic way. The point is to activate a psychic force because the pace must be increased and yet that connection with breath must also be maintained. Thus, what occurs after a short time is a condition of weariness that would induce most people to break the connection in order to breath more frequently or even to stop and to catch one's breath. Once a certain limit is reached, an inner act is required in order to go further. Then what sets in is a new state in which walking and breathing form a natural unity no longer requiring one's supervision; there is no more tiredness and the initial speed of the assault is not only maintained effortlessly, almost by some mysterious inner push, but it is even increased despite steep inclines.

I would not talk about this unless I had a personal, though limited, experience of it and unless I had not personally verified and repeatedly heard from others how, through this method, climbs can be done in half the time (or even less) than that usually taken by a mountain guide or by a well-trained climber.

Moreover, I have personally verified the curious phenomenon whereby, as soon as I tried to stop for just an instant, a strange force that was almost beyond my control immediately urged me onward. The inner act that activates the second wave at the precise moment the habitual energies are depleted can hardly be described and taught; each person needs to find it by himself. However, it can hardly be understood by those who have not learned to divide their souls into two parts: one being used for absolute commanding, the other for unconditional obeying.

I wish to add two more brief comments. The first concerns the heart. Such training is not recommended for those who suffer from a cardiac condition. But those who are healthy will certainly not be harmed by it. This is not the context in which to explain at length the reason why; I will only say that it is dangerous to one's health to engage in a training of a purely physical character, in which one acts almost automatically without any contact with the inner functions, often subjecting to an overwork the limited energies which are available to the organs. Conversely, there are fewer dangers when the real support is no longer provided by the body but by the spirit, and where mysterious, supernatural, and deep-seated energies are evoked, which not even modern parapsychology has been able to measure in all their possibilities. This is not, as someone may think, an effort destined to have a fatal repercussion, such as the collapse of the body at a later time. Those who have really learned to master this training do not lament any reaction in that sense: I can testify from personal experience, I spent long summer periods in the mountains and on glaciers practicing that technique without any negative consequence to my body or to my nervous system.

My second observation concerns great heights. Great heights (from 3500 meters and up) represent a particularly favorable condition for psychic mountain training. They offer the opportunity for an easier and more spontaneous unfolding of the vital force, not without reference to the different rhythm of the blood circulation, caused by the lighter atmospheric pressure. We can even say—from an inner point of view, not that to which ordinary medicine is limited—that mountain sickness constitutes a spontaneous emergence of this phenomenon in a person who has only been able to experience it in a passive way.

When this phenomenon is actively assumed and actualized, mountain sickness is replaced by a sense of lightness, by lack of tiredness, and almost by an intoxication that does not dull the senses but which bestows lucidity, a sense of impulse to action, which is the same that, in psychic training, always accompanies in a particularly lively and characteristic way every ascent, almost erasing the perception of time.

I will conclude on this note.

In the example I presented previously of using breath in climbing, I only meant to hint at the limit of certain possibilities. Again, I wish to repeat that in no way do I intend to suggest that climbers ought to become like fakirs. After all, even in the East, the fakirs, those who are busy producing prodigious feats, are regarded by the higher castes with no more respect than we regard illusionists. This is not what I am talking about. Even the desire of being able to climb a mountain at a fast pace is a questionable thing.

However, in each of the above-mentioned descriptions, there is an inner and an outer aspect; only the first one is essential, the latter is only consequential. I have remarked that what I have mentioned in this context about technique is often part of the experience of the best climbers, those who do not consider climbing to be a mere sport. Those who, in every physical ascent, experience a little the sense of an inner elevation; those who look at every icy height almost as the symbol of an intangible culmination; those who really grasp the message of the vast spaces, where there are only heaven and pure, free forces—they will most likely experience themselves not as *body*, but rather as *life;* they are likely to transform their lives with a creative vital tension so much as to achieve the results of the technique I describe.

In contrast, those who do not ascend as if they were carried by the body as if by a well-trained beast of burden are guarding the body's life forces. They are directly and consciously supporting the body with its inner energy, and thereby exalting it, energizing it, and bringing it forward in a manner that does not need to struggle against the flesh's weariness and weight. They are the most likely to intimately perceive the ritual meaning of an ascent, that living meaning of purification and liberation, whereby the ancient world (from the Greek Mount Olympus to the Hindu Mount Meru) saw in the great heights the symbolic dwelling of superhuman entities: what I have described in this chapter is one aspect of what the ancients may have experienced as sacred on a mountain.

10

The Ascent of Mount Langkopfel

How many more hours to the top?" somebody asks. Looking elsewhere, almost as if it was not worth it to look at the mountain or at the people, the mountain guide answers softly, "Four."

Four hours is not a long time, and yet, knowing that does not make the peak look any friendlier. The mountain, of a uniform gray color, seems to rest in a narrow basin of frozen snow and then to mushroom into a number of towers and spires that appear to get lost in the distance. Far away lies the peak, invisible to the naked eye. A woman who lives in the mountain shelter says, almost with contempt in her voice, "A lot of people go up there. One evening they brought down somebody who died. Another time they brought back a man with a broken leg. They go up there by themselves, and then, almost always, the mountain guide has to go up there and bring them back down."

The woman seems to be talking to herself; she leaves as if none of this is her concern. I spontaneously recall the saying, "Men come and go, but the mountain remains." I look at the spires bathed by the twilight, seeming to ask me a mute question.

The following morning at seven o'clock I leave the shelter. Dense clouds at the horizon dim the light of the rising sun but the sky above is free and clean and the mountain is the color of lead. I patiently climb the scree; this is a task that requires my concentration because I often lose my balance with the frequent slides. I head toward the place where, according to the map, my assault on the mountain face should begin. I have to move to the left because the wall before me is totally vertical. Starting from the left, I need to assault the rock and then travel diagonally toward a little valley located higher up. I press on. For the first few meters I proceed blindly, constantly shifting my four limbs in search of invisible holds. When, after going around the first smooth, protruding boulder, I finally succeed in finding a foothold, I feel I have reached a great vantage point. The rock becomes easier to handle and now I am able to climb it vertically. Farther ahead there is another succession of diagonal ups and downs that leads me to the little valley in the middle. One and a half hours have gone by and we are just a few dozen meters from the base, which looks very distant despite being directly below me, because in between is the very steep wall.

Here I am, on the narrow depression spotted with snow, but we still need to reach the real base of Mount Langkopfel. An icy canal to the left, between the vertiginous mountain walls, seems to be the only possible way. Luckily I have an ice axe with me; it takes strength to carve niches, so I engage in short runs, at the risk of losing balance, in order to gain space and save energy. However, the more I climb the more the ice canal seems to grow longer. Having finally succeeded in reaching another section of pure rock, a new sight unfolds before my eyes: a series of boulders, corners, towers, and pinnacles criss-crossing on top of each other. Every pinnacle seems a goal, every boulder a way. After a brief rest we move on (once again I experience the strange feeling from the depths of my being of an almost automatic impulse urging me on), relying on our arms' strength, from rock to rock. The rocky perspective becomes wider and more complex as I ascend. When I think I have finally arrived at the top, there is yet another boulder to climb. The towers begin to look thinner, grouped together, far away. Now, as I follow a hypothetical route, they group together on the side, becoming an airy and evanescent thing resting in the sky. Suddenly, I emerge on the crest.

The wind is raging, the horizon is round. Beneath me the valley is covered by clouds: only the peaks and the glaciers, suspended in the sky, are clearly visible. Mount Langkopfel is still before me as a tangle of vertical peaks. What should I do? I descend a little, on the opposite side of the line of the crest. Following providential scratch marks of spiked shoes along a twisted rock face made easy to climb by many rocks on the ground, I suddenly ascend again. The grips multiply, the mountain walls become lower. I feel an influx of new strength and the fervor of conquest. Here I am, alone on top of the last rock. There is nothing else around me. The wind is raging, but the open sky is engulfing me.

When I look down again at the valley below, the view is far from promising. The clouds have reached my position and from the bottom vapors are rising very fast, one wave after another. I look at my watch. By God! Seven hours have gone by. It is time to go back.

I travel again on the ledge, but during the descent the rocks become increasingly steep and the grips less reliable. From the vaporous and phantasmagoric appearance of the rock forms and pinnacles that by now have been reached by the fog, I move into a colorless, dim, and treacherously humid atmosphere that hides everything from sight. I proceed slowly, but to no avail; there is a chance I may get lost. I put on my snow jacket and eat something; crouching in a ravine, I wait.

It is hardly a pleasant surprise when I realize it is already six o'clock P.M. when I finally manage to enter the ice canal after a difficult passage. Ironically, the air clears up just as the sun begins to set behind the high peaks! Without wasting a second I slide down the ice, digging the ice axe into it with all my strength in order to slow my descent; with the same speed I enter the small valley. I cannot find the road, however. The rock is slippery because of the humidity and every move requires careful examination, attention, and patience. Finally I see the spots of snow. Good. I move on. But where the descent begins I can no longer see anything and I can barely orient myself. I am uncertain about the way back. A new state of mind sets in: anxiety and boredom.

After a few meters I realize I have made a mistake. I must go up again. On the right side it seems better. I move on, yet I wonder where I am going to end up. There is only a little light on the peaks and down below I cannot distinguish anything clearly. The rock has become a uniform, ice cold, indifferent mass. At this point it doesn't seem to matter if I go in this or that direction; I have the feeling of going toward the void, as if with every step I am about to fall and be hurled into it. The fingers instinctively and nervously clasp the holds; the feet are unsteady, tired of the same position, and try to reach out to the void, but when they do not feel anything but the flat mountain wall, they return to the spot they were occupying. I need to find a way out, but I do not seem to have many choices.

It is not possible to stop here. I could find again the small valley and spend the night there but finding it again is easier said than done because of the total darkness. I cannot find my way back with just my hands; I do not know what is awaiting me even if I were to overcome this or that immediate obstacle. I must keep my cool, control my nerves, and maintain my intense concentration. I have to make it down, one way or another. And so I begin this incredible descent into the darkness and the void, trusting only the nimbleness of my limbs, crawling very slowly along the mountain wall, with a heightened sense of touch and of awareness. My foot keeps searching and sliding downward while holding the body in balance, no matter how unstable, until it stops and takes a risk; it is an adventure to let go with the hand without knowing whether the body will hold. I am greatly relieved each time I feel a new hold and I am able to restore my balance. My body has become one thing with the rock, and it is animated by an instinctive dexterity and by an unexpected and supernormal lucidity. The experience of not knowing where I am is continuous—the darkness has become something permanent, material, dense, into which I seem to constantly move.

All of a sudden, I think I see a flash. Can it be? Yes! It is a light oscillating and coming toward me. I can hear somebody shouting in my direction. I answer with a voice that hardly sounds like my own. The light approaches rapidly, almost leaping; how can it be, even if the guide were running? And yet, after only a few minutes, I can make out the contour of Franz Broschek's face in the darkness. He yells to me, "This way! You have made it!" With a jump the Austrian guide climbs up to me and offers me the end of a rope. "Tie this around you. We are on the scree. I didn't think I would be able to find you. Let's go now."

Now I realize there is a second light on the rock. It is carried by the Italian mountain guide Carlo De Netz. "Where the hell are you going?" I ask them. "Do you think that the two of us came all the way up here just to pick up a nut like you?" says De Netz. "We need to find six more people who are about to spend the night on the glacier, for God's sake!"

A little later my feet touch the ground after sixteen hours of adventure. High up the two lights continue their march along the great dark silhouette of Mount Langkopfel, which solemnly emerges against the background of a starry sky. Down below, the lights of the refuge yield the promise of a well-deserved dinner and a nice bed.

Ice and the Spirit

Ortler. Last night was a stormy one. At dawn, looking out from the mountain shelter Payer, gaps of blue sky, visible through waves of rapidly moving clouds, gave us hope. We take off toward the glacier in order to reach the highest peak of the Ortler massif. On top of Mount Tabaretta (where we found a skeletal signpost and the remains of a hut crushed under the weight of ice), the fog, the wind, and the storm are back. We go ahead despite all because there are other groups nearby that are accompanied by guides who, thanks to quick sightings of crevices and seracs, are able to orientate themselves and find the right direction in this white mass in which the sky and the snow are fused together.

And so we continue slowly but steadily, at times pausing when the violence of the wind threatens to blow us away and to take our breath away. We wear heavy clothes, big gloves, and ski masks, which, after being hit by thousands of whirling particles, have almost become stiff crusts of ice. We proceed at a tired pace through the fresh snow in which our legs sink up to our thighs, struggling to find a solid foothold on the steeper slopes.

Finally we see the top—or what must be the top; not only can we barely see in this weather, but every part of the glacier looks like every other. Our tracks in the snow have already disappeared, a few minutes were enough for the storm to erase them. Even the three guides in the other parties cannot find their way; we can barely make out their silhouettes as they test the ground here and there with their ice axes trying to avoid falling into a hidden crevice.

But suddenly, a transformation occurs—a view that can never be forgotten or described with words. After a strong gust of wind a clarity is manifested all around; although it still does not reveal the sky or the ground, it creates an ethereal and immaterial atmosphere. This milieu is pervaded by silent waves of light, resembling breaths or shivers, as if it were a living organism. The shapes of the members of the other groups look as if they are suspended in air, shadowless, weightless. It looks as if a memory from the Greek past has come alive and is appearing to us: as in the ancient myth, ethereal bodies *(pneusomata)* are wandering through fields of light on the immaterial lands of the blessed and the heroes.

That view lasts only a few seconds. After that, more fog and wind gusts follow. Finally we return to the earth, to the solid and infernal elements, to the things made of corruptible hardness and to forms subject to birth and decay under the monotonous daily light.

Weiss-Kugel. To those who are familiar with glaciers, the ascent of Mount Weiss-Kugel (3860 meters) is, in itself, no great feat. From a tiny Italian mountain refuge built on the last rocks before the ice, we proceed onto the glacier in a long, patient detour that enables us to avoid areas marked by huge crevasses. We reach a pass; beyond it lies the road leading straight to the peak. This road winds up a steep slope that is technically easy to climb due to the favorable condition of the snow, which allows a firm hold for iron soles as well as hooks and snow axes.

However, a new experience is the descent along the Austrian side, which has occurred in an adventurous way, since in this white desert the information gathered from our maps is not really helpful; gusts of fog hide the peaks from our sight, depriving us of a valuable reference point.

After hours of ascending in a northern direction, we thought we would find solid ground and a new path behind a group of rocks. What we find instead is a sea of ice, a huge solidified current of ice, almost flat, not white but gray—an almost-shiny, leadlike gray—laying between two banks of boulders and sand, at times black, at other times a red color. All around is a dead silence, a desertlike solitude, a total absence of any form of life, of colors.

Often the mind derives instinctively an indefinite meaning from words that is connected to mysterious analogies. The words that come to my mind in this place are: "the valley of damnation." I do not know why. This area seems to be stricken with some curse or with something that cannot be removed for all eternity. It is as if these rocks were broken by lightning, hurled down from high peaks, to finally lie down as tragic, gloomy, hopeless shapes. It is as if this enormous stream of ice were once alive and had now become a gray, nameless, and monotonous mass, or a brightness buried in a leadlike solidity.

These confused analogies applied to yet another element: endlessness, eternity. We have been walking for several miles on the gloomy ice, hoping to see an end in sight; however, the same scenario continues before us, always the same, discouraging, without variations. We walk in the same landscape between two cursed banks of rocks. We have been walking and climbing for about ten hours since we left the shelter. By now the backpacks are "killing" our shoulders and our strength is dissipating. Yet we can only press onward through this "valley of damnation," automatically, without any hope for inner or outer support before evening comes.

Around sunset we are half-delirious with exhaustion, but the gray ice finally ends, generating a great current of yellowish and turbulent water that seeks a way through the endless rocks and morainic debris. We follow this river and finally, higher up on the rocks, we see the first and only sign of human presence: a linear building, somewhere between a Bavarian and a modern style, the color of white bones or bared nerves. Through an absurd mental association, it reminds me of an 1845 tale by E. A. Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher,* about an accursed mansion. This building turns out to be the Hochjoch-Hospiz, the first Austrian mountain shelter, an excellent resting place staffed by cordial people and endowed with good food. The experience of the "valley of damnation" slowly descends into my subconscious.

Oberwalder-Hütte (Gross-Glockner). The evening descends calmly upon the glacier and the islandlike rock on which the shelter lies. From inside come echoes of songs and reflections of light; I venture alone beyond the rock, on the snows, following a track, in the direction of Mount Weisbach-horn.

In this environment, a soul open to new experiences is likely to feel an inexpressible nostalgia and a deep yearning for the indefinite and the formless. This scene is a new type of desert and a new face of silence. Behind me the evening vapors emerging from the valleys below allow only the sight of the icy peaks. These peaks, illumined by the last reflections, stand tall and majestic; they are the only things in the sky that still hold on to the light, looking disembodied, simultaneously close and far away, like memories, like silent apparitions. Ahead of me lies a gray-green color resembling seawater, in which the sky and the snow are barely distinguishable. The barely visible path leading to the top is the only rhythm; it is like the trace of the desert on one's soul, a blessed and painful solitude.

I yearn to keep walking. Everything is far away, healed, forgotten. The blessed night descends upon me. I experience the simplification of my soul and of all things.

And finally, the first stars begin to blossom in the sky above me.

12

The Valley of the Wind

After much huffing and puffing, whistling and screeching along the steep slopes, looking as if it could not have made one more meter, no matter what the cost, the miniature train from Merano finally arrives amidst a glorious white cloud of steam at Malles, the last stop on the itinerary. We get off the train and my first sensation once outside the heated compartment is like being suddenly plunged into ice-cold water. The air is extremely dry and frigid. All around there are great mountains covered by snow. Down in the valleys, great dense masses of trees, some red-green, others—those farthest away—of a dark metallic color, almost deep blue. The peak of Mount Ortler emerges far away in the background; it appears to be more celestial and brighter than ice, almost of a more precious quality.

The train station (if we may call this tiny Swiss kiosk a station) is almost deserted. The few travelers quickly disperse. The town looks deserted as well, except that the chimneys send puffs of smoke into the livid afternoon sky. Gigantic pictures and sayings in Gothic letters on billboards in the main square remind us of a stage after the show is over. We stop a hooded person who has just come out of the Unicorn Hotel: *"Wie weit bis Reschen?" "Drei guten Stunden,"* he replies. We need a "good three hours" to arrive at our intended destination, the lakes of Resia. It is two o'clock in the afternoon. It is a waste of time to wait for tomorrow's bus. We decide to go on foot and to drink a well-deserved cup of tea when we arrive. We follow a small road that starts at the last houses of the town and soon merges into a large road that connects the Resia Valley to Austria. As soon as we are in the open country, no longer sheltered by the lateral mountains above Malles, we are suddenly confronted by an unexpectedly strong wind, the likes of which is experienced only in the very high peaks on the Swiss borders. Usually winds blow in gusts, and with variations, pauses, accelerations, and restarts; what we experience is nothing like that. Imagine the continuous, immutable, constant stream of air produced by a fan. Then if you multiply its intensity as much as possible and think of it as cruelly and painfully icy-cold, you will have an abstract idea of what we are feeling. The valley of Resia is a pass totally open on its northern side. No significant chain of mountains protects it farther up. The atmospheric currents of the North, that might begin as far away as the Baltic Sea, can rush in very swiftly. Amazingly, this mighty air mass rushing into the valley is silent; there are no howls or whistles of wind because there is nothing against which the wind breaks out there in the middle of the frozen black ground under the big white sky. There are no traces of vegetation, no houses—only a harshness and a metallic definition of lines in the very dry air. There is no water, only very white ice canals.

"A good three hours to Resia." I do not know exactly how many hours it takes. It is not exaggerating to say that we struggle every inch of the way against this unbelievable northern wind that crushes your chest, cuts your breath, burns your eyes, and tries in every way to tear off your coat. We have been in storms when climbing high peaks, but this is an altogether different experience; we are walking on flat ground, without a storm, without being engaged in any real action, with little or no visibility due to the wild wind, in the middle of a static landscape that is desolate and characterized by the absence of anything human. The insolent and paradoxical aspects of this situation keeps us from turning around. But in order to reach our goal we need true concentration, a tenacity consisting not of physical strength but of method, automatism, insensibility, and unshakability: it is a real test. All things considered it is not any different from a march in the desert, under an unforgiving sun, when nothing else is left in one's mind except the unbending will that keeps one going in an automatic way. Resia, bathed in the sunset, looks like an abandoned town on the eve of a great cataclysm, or like a town evacuated under the threat of a mysterious scourge. There are no signs of life; it is truly a desolate sight. Once in a while, gusts of snow and pieces of ice fly from the roofs of the houses into the sky. We proceed with almost an attitude of a military patrol scouting an area. Suddenly we see the main group of houses and the church; farther ahead we see lighted windows under a hotel sign.

We see a short staircase outside the hotel and a massive door made of black wood; finally we are inside a Nibelungen-like environment, characterized by a warm mist made up of tobacco and stove smoke and alcohol. It is difficult to tell the size of the room; it is crowded with people talking, whispering, playing, drinking. The scene looks like a fantastic crowd of shadows either suspended or anchored in the smoky mist marked by lights, slow bluish spires, saturated with all kinds of smells; it is warm and alive, like an animal.

In the Valley of Wind people live barricaded inside during this part of the year.

What else should I remember about this excursion on Italy's borders? Winter forests, skiing, the great white panoramas we viewed from the peaks, the harshness of twelve degrees below zero Celsius under the shining morning sun. And yet none of these things were anything special.

Rather, I remember the experience of the lake of Resia at night. Believe it or not, we built a small nightclub there. In a house that looked like a cloister, built by noble French refugees at the end of the 1700s, one of us found a gramophone, and lo and behold, the jazz records of Wunder-Bar. Thus, the problem of what to do at night was resolved.

Somebody lights a big fire. Instead of drinking wine we drink rum and kirsch. We dance, and when we are drunk we begin to discuss things. Then we go out for a walk in the minus twenty-two degree night.

Somebody comes up with the idea of going to the lake. It is the middle of the night. Try to imagine an immense sheet of black crystal, as levigated as a mirror, extending for miles: that is what the frozen lake looks like. The snowy peaks on the two sides of the valley and the incredibly starry sky are reflected in this sheet with a magnetic neatness; this makes us think we are caught between a double mirage or a double transparency. Try to imagine, if possible, what it must be like to proceed toward the middle of the lake without skates, attacked by the northern wind, and in a physical and spiritual state of lucid intoxication in which alcohol, nature, and inner exaltation all play a role. However, it is not possible for those who have not experienced it to know what the breaking of the underwater ice is all about.

During the night, due to the rapidly falling temperature, it happens that the deep layers of ice that are immersed in the waters of the lake break up. When that occurs, one can hear a roar and a loud noise reverberating frightfully across the entire icy crust of the lake, transmitted through the valley by a powerful echo. This does not really pose any danger, since these fractures do not reach the surface. However, to feel all of a sudden under one's feet a roar that grows into a loud booming noise, which is then echoed by the mountain, is almost like hearing the voice of the earth itself. It feels like an abyss is going to open up under one's feet. This is truly a very frightening experience that chills one's blood the way an earthquake does. It sparks the awakening of a primordial, marvelous, and frightening sensation that is dormant in very archaic recesses of our nature. The details of that night are embedded forever in my memory: the incredible cold; the wonderful starry night; the reflective, shimmering snow all around us; the feeling of excitement mixed with lucid tension; a perfect mental equilibrium; and the dreadfully primitive feeling that arises from the depth of the lake in the absolute silence of the valley. In these circumstances one can understand how it is possible, without any rhetorical exaggeration, to talk about such a moment as one that transcends ordinary life. The Valley of the Wind and the night spent on the frozen lake will remain in my memory forever.

13

The Ascent of Mount Gross-Glockner

The psychological motivation leading us to climb the highest Austrian peak, the Gross-Glockner (3798 meters), by the most difficult route (the Pallavicini-Weg) was twofold.

First, my group was driven to this expedition by an inner impulse to be different from everybody else, which regularly awakens in us every time we visit the highest Austrian or German mountains. During the summertime these peaks become more or less rallying points for all kinds of people who follow the ordinary route. For my part, I must admit to being behind the times and the contemporary ideals; personally, I still uphold and defend an aristocratic view of the mountain as the domain of a privileged few. I believe that mountain climbing is more an ascetic exercise and a path to spiritual liberation than a democratic sport available to the multitudes. However, in this context I do not intend to argue about principles. If we admit that it is a good and socially useful thing for people of all social classes, ages, and genders to travel from the city to nature and to experience in a natural way feats that were usually performed according to a different meaning, then it is safe to assume that German people are ahead of all other European nations. Leaving aside any evaluation of this phenomenon, I just wish to explain the reason why we rejected outright the idea of ascending the mountain by the ordinary route (starting from Mount Adlersruhe-Hütte and crossing over Mount Klein-Glockner). We thought that the only thing this route lacked was a policeman to direct traffic along a path that had become a sort of perpendicular trench with the passing of time.

Thus, our first motivation, which set in almost as a natural reaction, was the desire to be as little "in good company" as possible and to conquer Mount Gross-Glockner by a new route that still retained the elements of isolation, challenge, and risk. This is where our second motivation came into play.

By flipping through the pages of the most famous and often-quoted guide of this mountainous region, we found the description of the Pallavicini route was written in almost alarming terms. First of all, it was graded as a sixth degree of difficulty and it was said to be *ausserst schwierige und gefahrvolle* (namely, extremely difficult and fraught with dangers). Second, it was only attempted twice, once in 1889 and again in 1923. The guide estimated the duration of the climb to be between ten and twelve hours; this meant that one could possibly get caught at nightfall in the middle of the vertical icy wall if there were a delay caused by unfavorable atmospheric circumstances. Third, to complete this alluring scenario, the guide warned readers that it would be necessary to carve in the ice no less than twenty-five hundred steps!

Although at that time we did not know that this information was misleading, we thought that these facts were intimidating enough to keep away ordinary tourists who crowd the regular route and also to confer an aura of apprehension on a very challenging ascent. For our part, we did not take these warnings seriously, both because we knew the tendency of guides—especially German ones—to exaggerate, and also because in an ascent on pure ice the difficulties are always relative to the conditions of that particular time. In this last regard we could refer to the personal and specific experience of the ascent of the northern wall of the Eastern Lyskamm (located on Mount Rosa's massif), which was extremely similar to that of the Pallavicini-Weg and was also regarded as extremely difficult.

When we reached the massif of the Gross-Glockner the weather conditions could not have been better. It had snowed for almost a week above 2500 meters and beautiful sunny days had ensued. Our expectations were that, no matter how steep the mountain face was, we were not going to be confronted by either ice or a layer of soft and inconsistent snow covering ice (the worst possible scenario), but rather by snow that had frozen over the ice. We were hopeful that this snow would not be too hard. If it were, we would be forced to ascend by carving one step at a time. If it were too soft, it would not be firm enough to support our weight. On August 19, 1934, we began the ascent, which, in terms of the difficulty and amount of time required, turned out to be not as difficult as the guide had described it to be.

The ascent was attempted in a roped party consisting of three people: an Italian gentleman, Carlo Rossi di Lauriano; a British citizen, Sir Edwin Grant Duff; and myself. The day before, we traveled to the Oberwalderhütte to observe a small mountain refuge that was anchored on a black rock jutting, like an island out of the icy Gross-Glockner massif. From there I drew a sketch of the mountain and studied the route we were going to follow with the help of a pair of powerful binoculars that we found in the refuge.

Before we began our assault on the mountain face, we unfortunately had to waste a lot of time in order to get there. We traveled across a sea of ice that lay before the mountain and then across the Pasterzengletscher, a crevasse glacier riddled with seracs. On one hand, wasting too much time on this preliminary part causes one to be on the mountain wall just when the sun begins to melt the snow, making it treacherous. On the other hand, while crossing the so-called sea of ice can easily be done in the dark, by leaving from the Oberwalderhütte, or from the closer Hoffmannshütte (which is what we did), the same cannot be said about the part immediately under the mountain wall, especially in the above-mentioned circumstances. This is because the abundant snowfall poses a constant threat by barely covering crevices and precipices; one definitely needs at least a minimum amount of light in order to proceed with a certain degree of safety and without having to test the snow every step of the way.

We head toward the right where some rocks overlooking the sea of ice and a hill of compact snow prove to be helpful to us. Then we proceed longitudinally, moving almost parallel to the crevasse surrounding the Glockner massif. We finally reach a point where, at the beginning of the Pallavicini-Weg route, the crevasse is broken up because of avalanches.

As far as the technical aspect is concerned, there is not much to be said about this ascent, as is the case with almost all climbs on ice as opposed to those on rocks.

We find the first part after the crevasse to be in excellent condition; it presents no serious challenge, thanks to the snow that has fallen from above and piled up. As we proceed, the slope becomes very steep (sixty-five percent, according to the guide we consulted); the ascent would require a lot of time if we faithfully follow all of the required safety measures. For our part, happy as we are not to have found the much-feared type of ice, we begin our climb by assaulting the mountain, that is, by taking fast steps supported rather riskily by the ice axes we dig in upward. We do this until, having exhausted our agility and energy for these short races, we begin to dig firm holds with our axes in order to be able to stand up and keep our balance—or at least, leaning against the ice, to pause for a few seconds in order to catch our breath for the next little run. This method allows us to save a significant amount of time. On one hand, it is riskier than proceeding at a regular pace (in which one adopts reciprocal safety measures), but psychologically speaking it has the merit of retaining a tension and a spirit of conquest, the influence of which on our nerves and physical faculties is far from negligible.

The time comes when to proceed in this fashion is no longer possible without being very reckless, since the mountain wall becomes increasingly smooth. Having exhausted our energies in a single advance, we risk lacking the strength to carve a resting place, considering that the ice by now cannot be cut into with only the ice axe. The sun, whose rise in the sky almost accompanies our ascent on the mountain face, gives us some help, up to a certain point, by softening the outer surface of the ice. We try to move more to the left, toward the rocks, in order to find again the favorable conditions of the snow. Unfortunately, beyond a certain point, we find exactly the opposite: fresh snow that has not frozen over and that, considering the incline, threatens to slide and drag us along toward the valley below. Thus, after two or three zigzags, we head back to the middle duct. This is the most difficult and dangerous part of the ascent; at the same time, this is the part that left indelible impressions on our souls.

By being suspended in the middle of the wall without any chance of escape—held between light and blinding ice away from any diversion or elan; forced into an iron lucidity, an absolute control of all the psychological and physical factors required to create a balance that any unforeseen element could easily jeopardize—we find the spiritual aspect of the experience of climbing, carried to the extreme. To feel alone in a free, merciless world with only one's strength to rely on; engaged in an intimate dialogue with the deepest and most mysterious forces of one's being; awakened to a pure, harsh dimension that almost enables us to partake of that same transcendence over and indifference toward the human domain that in the majestic and shining peaks seem to find their best symbolic representation.

In conditions such as these ascending on ice may be a better experience than climbing rocks. In this kind of experience, aside from the abovementioned inner sensations, one has yet another peculiar sensation—that of destiny or some kind of love of fate. The rock always presents an obvious face: it is solid, always the same. In order to conquer it, what is needed is strength, agility, and the ability to choose and use the right holds, which can very rarely be tested beforehand. In contrast, ice can give way at any time. Then it is impossible not to incorporate as a living element in one's thoughts the idea of surrendering oneself to destiny, becoming one with one's unknown destiny, considering that one does not take hundreds, but thousands of steps in the steep wall of ice, which could slide or give way for the slightest reason. If centimeters or even millimeters of ice give way, that is enough to cause the foot to slide and the unfortunate climber to be hurled into the abyss.

In this kind of ascent, it is not possible to climb step by step and to gain a firm foothold (and not just the front part of one's axe), without taking an exaggerated amount of time. Nonetheless, the sense of security that is manifested, accompanied by an extraordinary lucidity of thought and movement, has an almost superhuman quality. If, in regard to any help from the outside, ascents such as these leave us alone with ourselves, at the same time, in regard to the inner dimension, they connect us with something that is greater than ourselves. This is an action that is connected in a deep and transfiguring way with destiny, understood as a higher law that prearranges in an opportune manner the relationships of the mysterious powers of things with those of all living beings. We could almost say that these meanings, as they arise from the experience of ice and of high mountains, find an unconscious and silent expression in the image of the great cross that is planted on the peak of Mount Gross-Glockner: it is immovable, made of iron bars, encrusted with ice, almost the comprehensive symbol of a cosmic hardness, of sacrificial dedication, of destiny and of transfiguration.

At one point the ascension changes pace. Because of the particularly hot midday sun we cannot continue to approach the center of the ice canal without serious danger. Fragments of ice and rock begin to fall from above, piercing the air like bullets; moreover, there are small snow slides that might precede bigger ones capable of dragging us downward. After some zigzagging we decide to move toward the left, toward the line of the so-called Nord-Grat, a ridge of black rocks.

Here we encounter the same problem, that is, areas of very smooth, hard ice, close to the rocks, but with the advantage of reliable hold offered once in a while by the rock itself. This ridge leads us directly to the Obere Glocknerscharte, a small saddle that can be seen between the two highest peaks. The Pallavicini route ends here, merging with the ordinary path in a crest of ice one foot wide, with the abyss yawning to the right and left, and yet bearing very deep and reliable traces created by the continuous passage of people. After this crest we rapidly reach the peak by climbing some slabs of rock on which have been secured metallic cords and stakes. On the peak we find the usual crowd found in mountain refuges: people equipped with guides, ropes, cameras, and binoculars. The latter are helpful in detecting the traces we left on the snow along the incredible path we followed all the way up here.

After leaving Hoffmannschütte at four A.M., we finally made it to the top at four P.M. However, we spent a good part of that time descending from that refuge to the level of the sea of ice and then crossing the glacier up to the last crevasse. Considering the conditions we faced, I do not think that the label "extremely difficult" applied to this ascent is correct, even though it is indeed dangerous and steep. To carve steps in the ice is really necessary only in some parts, provided the climber is endowed with agility, courage, and the capability to measure his moves, and also provided that on this basis one does not intend to turn the ascension into an extenuating work in order to have a maximum amount of safety. Again, safety on this kind of mountain face, exposed to the elements from start to finish, is always a relative thing.

14

Meditations on the Peaks

Mount Blanc, July. We ascend for several long hours from the darkness of the valley to the light of the peaks. We travel from the dark and dense Nibelungen-like fir woods pervaded by a thick fog, through the higher region covered with rocks and desolate moraines. Finally at dawn we reach the edge of the lower glacier. From afar, this area, as its name (Mer de Glace) suggests, resembles an immense body of water that has frozen over and turned into a flat and uniform mass. From up close, being continuously crossed with crevices and seracs, it resembles a tumultuous criss-crossing of bluish-white and grayish-white waves, the dynamics of which have been magically halted and solidified. We pass this strange white sea, out of which emerge peaks and dark ridges of broken rocks resembling fjords, leaving behind the last fog that still covers the valleys. We go over bridges, abysses of ice, and up mountain walls, working with our ice axes, using ropes and crampons, while a bright radiant light starts to spread all around us. We walk over some brief, steep walls of rock and then over some icy curves. Finally we reach the peak.

We are standing at the border. Around us, a circular horizon: a sea composed of many successive mountain chains, now rocky, now icy, which due to their variant qualities and to the different distances, assume every gradation of color until they become lost in the distant horizon, melting away and giving the sense of the infinite. Immaterial as apparitions, the forms of yet more peaks emerge very far away as if they were floating in a pearly atmosphere. It is the time of solar heights and of great solitude.

After these long hours, during which our tenacious will overcame fatigue, inertia, and the subconscious fears of the body, the memory of every concern and activity of the life of the plains fades away like an echo. Moreover, a different sense of self sets in and it becomes increasingly difficult to identify oneself with that hard, closed, and ephemeral shell, which for most people is the empirical "ego." However, this experience is not a mystic shipwreck or a sentimental sense of abandonment. Even lyricism is something that finds its proper place in literary circles rather than up here.

Here, where there is only the sky and pure, free forces, the soul participates in an analogous purity and freedom, and in this way one begins to understand what the spirit truly is. The soul perceives all this, and before the calm and triumphant greatness, all sentimentalism, utilitarianism, and human rhetoric disappear. Here, that which in the world of the soul has the character of purity, impersonality, and power finds its equivalent in icy heights, deserts, steppes, and oceans. We experience the breath of everything that is wide as an inner force of liberation.

It is up here on these peaks, beyond which lies another country—and from similar experiences—that one can truly perceive the secret of that which is imperium in the highest sense of the word. A true imperial tradition is not forged through particular interests, through a narrow-minded hegemony, or through "sacred selfishness"; such a tradition is formed only when a heroic vocation awakens as an irresistible force from above and where it is animated by a will to keep on going, overcoming every material or rational obstacle. This, after all, is the secret of every type of conqueror. The great conquerors of the past have always perceived themselves as children of destiny, as the bearers of a force that had to manifest itself and before which everything else (starting from their own selves, preferences, pleasures, and tranquillity) had to be sacrificed. Up here, all this becomes evident, immediate, natural. The silent greatness of these dominating peaks, reached at the risk of great dangers, suggests the silence of a universal action, an action that through a warrior race spreads throughout the world with the same purity, the same sense of fate, and the same elementary forces as the great conquerors; thus, as from a blazing nucleus, a brightness radiates and shines forth.

I believe that the strength behind the miracle of the Roman Empire was not any different from this. In the silent premeridian brightness, the slow and very high circumvolutions of the hawks above us evoke the symbol of the Roman legions—the eagle—in its highest and most noble representation. I am also reminded of the most luminous passages of Caesar's writings in which one finds no traces of sentimentalism, no eloquent comments, no echo of subjectivity, but rather a pure exposition of facts, plain language to describe things and events, and a style that is like shiny metal, just like the military conquests of this legendary hero of the Roman world. I am also reminded of the words attributed to Constantius Chlorus, words which greatly reveal the occult and maybe unconscious impulse of the Roman expansion. It is said that this military leader, gathering enigmatic traditions, journeyed with his legions as far as Britannia, not so much to perform military feats or for loot, but rather to discover the place where "the light never goes out" and to "contemplate the Father of the Gods," thus anticipating the divine condition which, according to an ancient Roman belief, awaited emperors and military leaders after their deaths. F. Nietzsche wrote, "Our lives and happiness lie beyond the ice, the North and death."

Through the symbol and in terms of obscure forebodings, this tradition leads us to comprehend the latent meaning of what can be called the Roman legionary spirit. These cohorts of men of iron, impassible, capable of any discipline, spread through the world without a reason and not even with a truly preordained plan, but rather obeying a transcendent impulse. Through conquest and through the universal realization they achieved for Rome, they vaguely perceived a foreboding of that which is no longer human, of that *aeternitas* (eternity) that became directly connected with the ancient imperial Roman symbol.

Such thoughts occur to me with a strange power at this time and in this place. And just as at night, from an elevated place, the lights scattered in the plains can be seen all the way to the most distant horizons, likewise what surfaces in my mind is the idea of a superior, incorporeal unity of the invisible front of all those who, despite all, fight in different parts of the world the same battle, lead the same revolt, and are the bearers of the same intangible tradition. These forces appear to be scattered and isolated in the world, and yet they are inexorably connected by a common essence that is meant to preserve the absolute ideal of the imperium and to work for its return. This will occur after the cycle of this dark age closes, through an action that is both deep and not evident, in virtue of being a pure spiritual intensity unaffected by human restlessness, passions, lies, illusions, and divisions. This intensity is symbolized by the calm and irresistible power of this light that shines over icy peaks. At these heights, symbols become alive and deep meanings are revealed. There are always moments (rare as they are, they still exist) in which physical and metaphysical elements converge and the outer adheres to the inner, forming a closed circuit: the light that momentarily comes out of it is certainly the light of an absolute life.

15

A Storm on Mount Rosa

At the time the cable connecting Mount Cervino to the glacier of the Plateau Rosa (3500 meters) was inaugurated, the conditions for those who really love the mountain and resent its *tourist* contamination were ideal. Since this is an area bordering with Switzerland, one could access the terminal station of the cable only with a special visa. Back then, the mundane, vacation, and pseudosportive refuge of those to whom the mountain has been made readily available as if it were a cheap elevator ride, did not exist. I was accompanied by a guide and that cable only helped us to reach a starting point and not our final destination, since our intention was to go across glaciers and rocks from Plateau Rosa to Mount Rosa's mountain group.

This crossing is a very long one, but it is not very difficult if the weather is fine and as long as one knows how to orient oneself. This going along in the midst of a primordial nature scene acts upon one's soul as a liberation; here the view reveals alternately snows and black or greenish broken rocks, with immense areas of slabs and rocks piled up as if they were the remains of a primordial cataclysm. We descend for a while along a high path on the rim of a valley; our eyes contemplate again the welcome and unusual sight of green fields and trees. Then we ascend again, reach a pass where footprints and red marks on the stones indicate the direction to the mountain refuge Sella on Mount Rosa. I know this direction very well. Thus I am puzzled when all of a sudden, almost magically, the path ends; there are no signs, only high rocks and landslides toward the glacier below.

It is evening already, we are at about 3000 meters and we have been walking since dawn. It is pointless to try to look for traces of the path.

Finally, we barely make out a path on the lower glacier. We descend to that spot, then we decide to follow the path, trusting our good luck. Soon, in the darkness, each next trace becomes our only reference. It is approximately ten P.M. when we reach the shelter. There we discover the reason for our bewilderment. Last year huge sectors of the mountain had slid. During the night we spend in the refuge, which is anchored on rock, we are very apprehensive: it feels as if the refuge is shaking with the rock. The old pathway has been destroyed.

The next morning I still want to cross the so-called Gemini (Castor and Pollux) one more time. These are two peaks about 4200 meters high, united by crests of ice. In itself this crossing is not a difficult one, although it may become so due to the weather and the conditions of the ice. Leaving Sella, we have to cross what could be called without exaggeration a "white inferno" (when the sun shines at full strength). This is a vast valley of snowy ice at a slight incline, surrounded by crevices, where the reflections of the sun and the heat are often unbearable in this very thin air. Then, after tackling the steep side of the peaks, we reach the crest of the peaks. What follows is a couple of hours of icy crests, with many crevices to the right and left; these crests are sometimes so thin that one has to walk without anything to lean on, balancing oneself on the middle part with the void on both sides. There are some difficulties only when, due to the northern wind, sections of very hard ice are formed. Then we have to carve small steps with the ice axe, taking turns so as not to run out of energy. Regardless of whether one is going alone or with another person, any safety measure is a pure illusion. The usual method, which consists of stopping, digging in the ice axe as far as it will go, and running a rope through it so that one's companion can be safely hooked on, cannot be used. This cannot be done on pure ice; to be attached to a rope represents only a perception of safety, the truth being that if one were to fall, he would drag the other unfortunate person along. But usually the Gemini are not that horrible. The reward for the tough ascent is a truly magnificent, indeed glorious, panorama of a sea of alps and peaks of the Swiss canton of Berne.

Our excursion does not present major difficulties. By the first hours of the afternoon we have already made it back to the refuge. A little later the weather changes. The lines of the peaks disappear amid gusts of fog. During the night the weather turns definitely nasty. However, the following morning a new radiant clarity shines on. In that light we see in the distance, on the lower part of the glacier, a man moving in a zigzag, falling down and getting up again like a drunkard. It does not take us long to catch up with him. He is bloodied in various parts of his body and he looks like a person having hallucinations. This is what we learn.

The previous day, two young men, two young ladies, and himself had attempted to cross the Gemini a few hours after us. The bad weather caught them on the group of peaks. Due to the lack of visibility the situation soon became desperate because everything depends on locating the only point that leads to the descent on the lower part of the glacier, on the Italian side of the border. They could not find that point and the five of them were stuck up there at 4200 meters. One can imagine what a night spent there must be like, with bad weather and the wind blowing from the north, without finding any shelter. These five tried to find shelter behind a piece of jutting slab, huddling together on a small slippery surface, with the void on both sides. By the early daylight one of the two girls had died (they had climbed in shorts!). Before the weather cleared up, the two young men left, desperately trying to find a way down. The third young man stayed behind with the second girl. As she slipped into a semiconscious state, he thought she was going to die. There must have been some sentimental connection between the two of them; the young man resolved to take his life and hurled himself over the precipice. However this move proved to be his salvation. His fall caused a small avalanche of soft snow that took him all the way down, almost unscathed, to the lower glacier. This was the man zigzagging in the snow, bleeding. The second girl up there did not die. She was taken to the refuge half delirious, but luckily for her she made it alive. As for the two men, one fell into a crevice and broke his leg, the other managed to get to the valley and called for help.

On this occasion I cannot help but think how much, in these high peaks, everything is in the hands of fate. Two hours later, and it could have been us in that kind of predicament. And what should I say when someone climbs almost vertical icy walls, where if two or three centimeters give way that is enough for him to fall to his death? And yet this may be one of the deepest aspects of the experience of mountain climbing: a kind of amor fati, to unite the excitement of the adventure with danger, to give in to trusting that which in our destiny is beyond human control.

PART THREE

Appendices

Appendix A

An Artist of the Heights: Nicholas Roerich

The art of Nicholas Roerich has become famous worldwide. In the United States, a country where there are trusts even in the intellectual domain, certain people have monopolized the greatest part of Roerich's artistic work; through a Roerich's Society Museum, conferences, and a luscious review *(The Archer)*, they attempt to create a "movement" around the personality of this artist.

In fact, Roerich, who is a painter, does not intend to limit himself to painting alone. Through his paintings and his wider activity (he has also composed poems, written articles, and published accounts of his travels in Asia), he first and foremost aims at spreading the sense of a higher order of reality in the modern world.

In considering his paintings, we must conclude that their main characteristic is the portrayal of nature—through relatively simple means, although not lacking a certain decorative style—in terms that awaken a strange sense of interiority and almost of liberation.

This should not be explained through something subjective and fantastic that Roerich's art adds and superimposes onto reality, but rather, and foremost, through a power that is intrinsic in the very nature of the subjects he deals with. This can be clarified as soon as we say that Roerich's recurrent theme is the Himalayas; the titanic and transfigured nature of the Himalayan range, with its heights, its vertiginous peaks, its abysses, its nameless silences, its celestial clarity.

Roerich, who is Russian by birth, has repeatedly traveled to the passes of the Himalayas and Western Mongolia, both by himself and at the head of an expedition; he often lived there in the company of lamas, in order to penetrate as deeply as possible into their magical and metaphysical traditions, in which the physical and the metaphysical, the real and the unreal, begin to merge in the same pattern. Therefore, it is the spirit of the Himalayas that talks to us through Roerich's paintings; this spirit, as I said previously, succeeds in awakening in those who can truly receive it, an ancient sensation of oneself and of things; a primordial and powerful sensation that has been buried in the subconscious due to the restless and prisonlike life of the modern Western world.

I have hinted at particular conditions in which the real and the unreal, the inner and the outer, the objective and subjective begin to merge into one reality. This happens spontaneously at great heights (above 4000 meters), both on the peaks and, provided one has a certain power of spiritual concentration, on an airplane. It may happen that, given a certain disposition of one's consciousness, the perceptions may begin to dematerialize; they acquire characteristics of weightlessness, immateriality, and morning light that cannot be adequately described to someone who has never experienced this.

In a state of semi-intoxication, which does not induce dullness but rather a higher lucidity, things talk to us in a way we never suspected before. Later on, what occurs is a dynamic unfolding of the imaginative faculty, which reacts upon the senses, translating perceptions here and there into images that have a symbolic character, like that of dreams; these form myths that find their place in the pattern of the waking consciousness. It seems that in Tibet this happens in a prominent way: there is a mentality that may effectively be said to be the permanent domain of similar states, which contain the secret of many strange traditions and which, when seen from the outside, appear as pure superstition.

To be able to understand this, as odd as it may appear, is essential to understand Roerich's art in all its elements: this is an art of snowy and rarefied heights, where sensibility and the air become dematerialized and convey at all times the sense of transparency and of alpine silence. In almost a constant fashion we see in his landscapes the emergence of myths and symbols: figures of ascetics in deep meditation; magic fires; shapes of idols; elemental apparitions; strange, unnatural inner reflections of light emerge in his paintings in the background behind seas of valleys and alps; alps everywhere, as far as the eye can see. This does not have the value of a fantastic overlapping with reality. In a setting such as the Himalayas we may say that myth becomes part of reality. In a way myth continues reality, it interiorizes and completes with a purpose that transpires immediately out of those forms, symbols, and lights about which one can no longer say whether they are inside or outside of oneself; or whether they are lights of things or illuminations of the spirit, or both at the same time.

Those who have been in the great plateaus of Tibet, without being concerned with exploring or being part of an expedition with specific goals, can testify to this sense, which comes to life when the soul of the Tibetan religion, the forms of its spirituality and its traditional magic, are penetrated. Roerich is the first Westerner (provided we may call a Russian a Westerner) who has been able to pick it up and to express it through paintings, while at the same time feeling it as something that goes beyond mere art and beyond the simple and private aesthetic sensation, because it tends to become realized as a sense of life itself. This is why his paintings have essentially the character of a way: a way toward something transcendent, in the integral meaning of this word, and with reference not to an abstraction but to a real experience. I believe that something may truly be called art only when it rises to assume such a value.

The Himalayas lead us to a nonhuman purity, to a nonhuman breath: "Many meters above sea level—but how many more above ordinary men!" wrote Nietzsche about Sils-Maria. This peak, just like the highest Italian mountain (I remember the nocturnal view of the white desert from the Capanna Margherita on Mount Rosa) reconnects us to our natural and cosmic nature, which is the same as that of the elemental forces of the earth, the powerful purity and calm of which is impressed upon the icy and shining peaks as if they were absolute and immaterial peaks, or magnetic rhythmical knots in the great plot of the Whole.

This is the reason why we can detect in Roerich's art a ray of liberation, of the truest liberation.

Appendix B

Art and Symbol in the Seat of the Snows

The specific traits of any great traditional civilization are cooperation and oneness. In this type of civilization the various manifestations of life are not fragmented into separate domains but are gathered around the same axis and are permeated, to different degrees, by the same spiritual and transcendent meanings. The external becomes a symbol of the internal; the visible becomes a symbol of the invisible. The world of action itself acquires a ritual meaning and can only be justified in this fashion. "Culture" in the traditional world did not possess the autonomous and purely secular character it has acquired in relatively recent times; in that context, culture appeared as a system of approximations that were meant to propitiate the virtual or real shift of that which in man goes beyond himself. This applied to thought as well as to the traditional heroic ethos, to the various sciences, and to art itself. In a civilization of a traditional type, art cannot be anything but religious art, in the superior, not merely devotional, sense of the word. The psychologism and aesthetical narcissism of a so-called author (much less naturalism or profane realism) cannot find any room in such a civilization.

I was reminded of these things when going through the pages of a wonderful publication of the Italian Academy that dealt with some aspects of the art of one of the most traditional types of civilization, namely, Indo-Tibetan art (see G. Tucci, *Indo-Tibetica*, Rome, 1933). This publication is a study devoted to the *mc'od rten* and the *ts'a ts'sa*. The former are monuments of the awesome "seat of the snows" (the meaning of the word

Himalaya) that are lined up along the paths of Tibet. These monuments are sometimes isolated, sometimes found in groups or connected to each other by low stone walls bearing sacred inscriptions. Ts'a ts'sas are small images made of clay, representing divine figures and symbols, which are meant for the most part to be ritually offered by the wayfarer as a substitute for the mc'od rten themselves, or to be taken in to them, since, in last analysis, mc'od rten literally means "receptacle, or support, of the offerings."

Mc'od rten of the "descent from heaven," of the "great enlightenment," of "victory," and of the "great wonder" are some of the very expressive names of the main examples of such strange Tibetan monuments. More than mere expressions of servile adoration and human piety, the symbols and formulations which they, or the stone walls by which they are connected, carry, suggest the gift of Dharma (the "law" or "way"). This way, revealed and actualized by such eminent beings as the Buddha, will always remain the principle of *vairagya* and of *udvega,* the disgust and inner turmoil that tear away the "noble ones" from mere living, arousing in them the sensation and the nostalgia for a truer, freer, more powerful reality. In this way, to erect a mc'od rten or to shape a ts'a ts'sa almost has the meaning of adding a new ring to the invisible chain of the "law" and of the "awakening." Since in the rigorous ritual that accompanies the edification of such monuments there is the sense and precise intention of attracting and of magically linking to them a divine life and presence, the act of he who makes an offering before the mc'od rten, recites a formula, and deposits a small clay image on that spot (with the intent of ritually materializing an intention and a faith) is going to signify participation in that invisible life, and at the same time an addition of a new vital germ to it, which will bear a hidden fruit in the life of he who has deposited it.

The author of the monograph I am talking about correctly remarks that in the paintings of the most characteristic traditions of India and Tibet,

> Everything which is related to faith is expressed in a colorful language of lines and forms which elevate the believer or the initiate to planes of superior experiences and therefore become efficacious vehicles of mystical realizations. The Indian art has never been characterized by technical precise-

> ness or by the faithful reproduction of invisible things. To construct, to paint, to sculpt means to translate into the hieroglyphics of line, form, or color, those experiences, truths, and intuitions which are present in everybody's spirit, though in different degrees.

This criterion is mirrored even by the mc'od rten, in which given symbolic, analogical, and even magical intentions inspire and influence the erection of the monument even in its minutest details, according to a specific form. At this point it is necessary to underscore the difference between this type of symbolic art and the type of religious art appearing in Christianity. That which to the Christian believer are deities in the form of persons or of supernatural beings that are distinct from him, in the metaphysical traditions of the East (as well as in many ancient esoteric traditions of the West), are merely symbols for transcendent states of consciousness and for mystical energies, both of which can be realized sub specie interioritatis along the way to the "awakening." Theology is thus replaced with a transcendental psychology. Here, that humanization and hypostatization of the divine (which is so frequently encountered in Christian religious art, until it generates a naturalism *sui generis*) is absent. The grotesque characterization of certain images, endowed with many limbs and heads, suggests that what is being represented is not remotely or even analogically related to nature, but is only as a symbol.

Moreover, the single parts of the small Tibetan monuments shaped like pyramids are meant to represent the stages or the hierarchical degrees of a journey toward "awakening" and inner realization. On the bottom, and acting as the foundation, the first step of the mc'od rten, according to Tibetan tradition, will help the wayfarer to recall the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, namely, the precepts of a clear consciousness of body, feeling, mind, and mental objects. From this step, proceeding upwards, we encounter the next element of the construction, which witness to the Four Perfect Exertions; then we find the elements symbolizing the powers of determination and the virtues propitiating enlightenment; then the elements symbolizing the Eightfold Path, which consists of right view, resolve, speech, conduct, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration. At its higher levels, the edifice hints at the transcendent forms of consciousness, at the capability of having visions that go beyond the limits of birth and death, and at the powers of courage and victory confronting the dark forces of nature and eros. Finally, at the top of the building, a triple ornament often expresses the supreme triad of sun, moon, and fire. The sun is the divine male energy; the moon, the realizing instrumental force, is the feminine *dynamis;* and the raging fire, which is the synthesis of the other two (often portrayed through the symbolism of the coupling of the solar god with his bride or "power"—the Sanskrit term *shakti* having this double meaning), is the principle of every activity and awakening.

In the entire above-mentioned hierarchy these elements, according to the Indo-Tibetan doctrines, are real as superconscious facts, as objective elements of the world, and, finally, as dormant powers lying in the deepest recesses of the human being. In fact, in some mc'od rten the symbolism establishes a correspondence between the various elements of the votive monument and the various mystical centers or "wheels of life" (chakra), which the knowledge of ascetics localizes in specific areas of the body. Thus, the sun and the moon are said to correspond to two mysterious energies at work in inner realization: their synthesis is that fire that arouses or causes such mystical centers to blossom and lead the ascetic to that supreme realization described in Buddhist texts through the symbolism of high mountains, of a victorious lion, or of the *dorje* (the mystical "thunderbolt-diamond body"). A Buddhist text says of these symbols, "Now there is no longer a here or there, no coming or going, no life or death, but only calm and enlightenment as in an infinite ocean."

I remember participating in a mountain climb this past summer, in a region that is among those that better preserve the echo of the most traditional Catholic Middle Ages: the Austrian Tyrol. Starting from the edge of dark and almost Nibelungen-like forests, and going all the way to the top, through scrub and huge boulders, following an uncertain path that winds amid moraines until it reaches the perennial glaciers, there were small, coarse sanctuaries made at those heights, more for things than for men. These sanctuaries followed a sacred format (the various stations of the Via Crucis, from the Passion to the Resurrection) but marked at the same time the stages of an exhausting ascent, from the fogs of the valleys to the shining and incorporeal brightness of the peaks. Up on top, at the peak of the Gross-Glockner, out of the glaciers stood a great cross made of iron bars, chained on the rocks, in the middle of a circular and vast horizon; on it we could read some verses, of intonation between the sacred and the heroic. This was a physical reality which, in moments of correspondence between the inner and outer self, carried at the same time some metaphysical element.

Maybe experiences like this introduce us in a direct way to the meaning of (in a region of similar heights, and yet impregnated with myth and symbolism, as Tibet is) the series of mc'od rten, the little stone walls, and the strange ritual stones covering deserted areas and remind the wayfarer of the ascetics who live in those silences and in that solitude.

Appendix C

Religiosity of Tyrol

If the Dolomite mountains appear consciously arranged, the Tyrol is an elemental world. Between them is the same difference that exists between the airy architectural structure of St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, and the Gothic splendor vibrating toward the sky from the black pinnacles of St. Stephen's in Vienna.

Despite all this, the Dolomites are like the Mediterranean world, a world of lights, colors, and air. Here, the third dimension of things is barely perceived, as if in a phantasmagoric landscape. During the night, its realm of clear apparitions emerging out of impeccable vegetation, is transformed into enigmatic, threatening, and elaborate silhouettes. This change invites the need to shift from contemplation to action, namely, to direct contact with the rock: challenging its resistance, its altitude, and its inviolable accessibility.

Conversely, the world of the Tyrol is a symbolic one. Its realm is not that of rocks but of ice. It is not even like the purely white world of the great western glaciers. It is as if nature itself prepared to be transfigured with pure icy light, with a sort of asceticism of silence and desolation. Elementariness is its main feature; the distance from man is much greater. This is the symbolism of Tyrol. Its counterparts are fragments of a traditional, closed, and deep religiosity, as if the inhabitants were still living in the Middle Ages, found among the sparse population. I have confused memories of a long traverse of the Gross-Venediger: from the Defregger-Haus to the Badwer-Hütte, and then, after following a high path, toward the so-called Innere Geschoss, all the way to the Tauern-Haus.

I will not talk here about the quality of the ice that is found on the higher path and is unmatched anywhere else in the world; nor will I talk at length about the path on the great spiked moraine crowned with clouds; nor about the serpentine paths unwinding amidst a chaotic and almost poisonous vegetation, taller than one's head; nor about the very sharp, wet, treacherous serpentine paths almost suspended over the abyss. Down below, the high valley and the stream. We press onward with the state of mind that usually comes upon climbers during the last hours of daylight. All of a sudden, the valley gives way to a gorge and becomes transformed. In the background there is only the peak. All around are jumbled yellow and black rocks that look more like wood than stone, lacking, so it seems, the cold and heavy quality of stone. There are rocks and then houses; we see the beginning of a village, but there is no trace of life. The dwellings are small wooden huts of all one color, the doors are open, the windows have fallen off; there are no people or animals in sight. The only sound is that of the invisible waterfalls coming from the glaciers.

On the side of the path there is a great cross with a date and a worn out sign. I do not recall exactly the German words but their meaning was approximately this: "Wayfarer, stop for an instant; look at the glaciers and also at the sign of He who died for our redemption and who taught us that death is the gateway to life."

According to an enigmatic legend, the sacred grail, the mystical stone of light that symbolized the living spiritual tradition of the medieval Western world, was transferred from Spain (beginning with Montsalvat of Salvatierra) to Bavaria and finally to Tyrol. In Innsbruck, in the Silver Chapel, among the statues of the legendary ancestors of the "last European knight," Maximilian I, there is also a statue of King Arthur of Camelot and of the Knights of the Round Table. Something of this obscure legacy seems to be preserved in Tyrol, even though in isolation. The origins of the Northern races, which are prevalent there, are unknown. Christianity must have revived this race and provided it with a deeper creed, thus giving it the opportunity of extending into a later historical period, although it changed in the process.

The presence of some primordial symbols in a Christianized—not simply Westernized—form must be attributed to this race. For instance, in the valleys of Tyrol and even in cities like Innsbruck and Lienz, we often find a strange variation of the crucifix that is erected upon hunting trophies and that displays around Christ a solar aura of the radiating type seen in primitive religions. On top of country houses, which always reflect the same characteristic style, there are interesting combinations of the crucifix accompanied by synthetic animal figures, differing from valley to valley, and still preserving a great degree of similarity to archaic totemic symbols.

In any event, there are frequent signs of a religion that rises above the usual sentimental or conventional plane and that leads directly to the plane of spiritual synthesis. In a previous essay of mine, entitled "Art and Symbol in the Seat of the Snows," I give an example of this. In the Oetztal a path leading to the glaciers is marked by images of the Via Crucis. The various stations are separated by long intervals. At the last Station of the Cross, the rocks end and the glacier begins. This trail is found in an area outside the most traveled alpine paths, as if it were placed there for a solitary and silent rite, yet it is filled with living meaning. On the Gross-Glockner, in a gorge in which the stream starting at the top of this mountain turns into a roaring waterfall, there is a small chapel with various *ex voto*. One of these is represented by medals of military valor with this sign underneath: "I owe to God the courage which bestowed this honor upon me."

I remember a ceremony celebrated in the church of Pragrateen, although I no longer remember the occasion. The church looked like a military parade ground: the men were on the right, the women on the left, all perfectly lined up, wearing their traditional costumes. In the middle stood a military delegation holding flags and insignia. They all sang a tune accompanied by an organ and reinforced by trumpets; despite some lack of harmony, it created a singular effect that did not lack a certain greatness. In the Tyrol there is no group of houses, no matter how remote and small, that does not have its own chapel. There is no alpine pass or panoramic view that does not have its own crucifix, which is always put back in place every time the wind or a storm knocks it down or sweeps it away. This is almost a silent invitation to transfigure and to integrate that which, as mere aesthetic emotion, may derive from the contemplation of nature in the superior form of a spiritual meaning and an enlightening symbol.

These are fragments of a lost world that will probably not endure much longer against the passing of time. Together with the Salisburg area, the Tyrol has become a fashionable resort area. An international public, composed of tourists and mundane guests, crowds these areas in the winter and in the summer, reaching even the most remote valleys, where new hotels are being built while the existing ones are undergoing renovation. The towns themselves take on the look of vacation sites or ski resorts. The local traditions and popular costumes have recently come to be seen as objects of exhibition, which amounts to their uprooting. Thus, the exotic public becomes "Tyrolized"; more and more people enjoy wearing the *lederhosen* and *dirndl.* All this marks the beginning of the end. One more generation and maybe the bourgeois swamp of the modern world will totally submerge and absorb even these last traces of a life that could truly be called authentic and normal.

Appendix D

The Kingdom of the Demon of the Peaks

San Martino di Castrozza. The town of Feltre marks the end of the domain of the trains slowly being pulled up these first spurs of the Dolomites. Here begins the kingdom of the rapid and barren paths that wind among gorges and woods.

Calm and gathered in a solemn chorus, in the evening light the mountain group of Feltre is left behind us. But shortly after passing the little villages of Fiera di Primiero and Agordo, the majestic nature of the alpine landscape can clearly be perceived. The speed of the cars decreases and constant shifting of gears becomes necessary. The sound of the rolling river is no longer a gentle whisper but a roar. The vegetation, in which the spruce fir is predominant, becomes thicker, forming masses of green of an increasingly metallic and deep color as the sunlight begins to dim. Between the fog and the vapors rising from the valley and the high and pale sky, the high peaks of the Pale Massif emerge one by one, in the changing game of perspectives created by the speeding car. There they are, Sass Maor, Cresta of Madonna, Peak of Bal, Rosetta, Cimon of Pala; they are barren, tragic and elemental forms, of a titanic purity. It looks as if the earth itself expressed its surreal and sovereign nature, without compromises or contamination by anything human.

We continue. The peaks, now that the sun is setting in the western valleys, become covered with shadow. They take on a glorious and ancient look. They are golden and purple, in a sky that looks even higher and farther away. The vapors discharged by the valleys and forests in the evening slowly rise up to them, becoming hidden from our view as the road plunges into the forest. We can see them again only when our cars, emerging from the woods after several switchbacks, enter San Martino di Castrozza.

From there the view is breathtaking: it is as if the peaks floated between the sky and the vapors. Disembodied brightness, they look like memories, or as immaterial echoes. The air is becoming cold, dry, and stinging.

The cars come to a stop. We see the sign for the Grand Hotel of the Dolomites. It looks like a large transoceanic ship anchored in the dock. The lights coming out of it are lined up, bright, regular. It is a sudden transformation: the mountain no longer exists. It is like a piece of metropolis at 1500 meters. The environment is elegant. We wear tuxedos for dinner. Inside it is warm, and the wild rhythm of jazz fills the room.

From San Martino di Castrozza the road to the Dolomites continues, leading to the passes of Rolle and Colbicon, the site of a glorious World War I memory for the Italian people. In San Martino, a town consisting only of great hotels, tourist groups stop before leaving on excursions to the peaks of the Pale Mountains. Then, all the expedients of modern technique, which prevails over distances and tiredness, fall short and man is finally left to himself, to his strength, his boldness, surrounded by things and by the forces of this wild and uncontaminated nature.

The alpine paths, starting from the area wooded by firs, lead to the area populated by juniper trees, and finally to the naked Dolomite rocks, fragmented and filled with gorges and screes of a blinding white-lime color. At 2400 meters the paths converge on the plateau of the Pale, which marks the point beyond which one is not likely to encounter daring young men wearing beautifully colored jackets with golden buttons *à la* Pitoeff or ladies with socks folded over *à la* tennis. In the middle of the plateau (there is a small mountain hut, where it is possible to spend the night around a nice stove, surrounded by an immense silence); this plateau is only a starting point for the real climbs.

In any event, the sight of this plateau is itself a matchless, unique, and impressive experience; it resembles a lunar, immobile, uniform desert. In it there is nothing for miles but raw smooth rocks of the same color, between pumice-white and opaque-silver, without reflections, arid, lifeless, soundless, motionless. Spots of snow appear here and there, sometimes blinding, sometimes precious-looking, of the transparency and brightness of quartz. In the background is the glacier of Fredusta.

This sight is likely to impress upon the soul an ineffable and indelible sense of dismay and of greatness. And, during the night, what absolute silence, and what bright heavenly vault, so powerful, dazzling, and sublime!

The plateau is the base camp of those who are possessed by the demon of the peaks; not all those who leave come back. Yesterday they found two from the "tent city" of a group from Milan; they were found smashed on the slopes of Mount Cimone.

Days ago it was the turn of a German man, at the Sass Maor.

Their bodies were transported to San Martino by mountain guides, adorned with a few alpine flowers and buried not far from the war cemetery that contains the remains of the heroes of Colbricon, a theater of fierce military operations during World War I. And yet, others have left and continue to leave on the same paths, toward the same walls on the same glaciers, with the same contempt for the danger found in every pass and in every move, and with the same self-confidence that makes them reject the assistance of guides and of roped parties.

There is some insanity in all this, but also a flame that flickers higher than all the small values cherished by ordinary people. In this there is something compared to which the mundane cosmopolitan life that contaminates the Dolomitic purity with its tennis matches, its tea, and its jazz, pales and appears cadaverous.

Everything in modern society tends to dampen the heroic sense of life. Everything moves toward mechanization, to the regulated and prudent community life of beings who are constantly in need of something, and not self-sufficient. Everything today tends to be reduced to the lower two of the four castes (the heroes, those who are initiated into wisdom, the merchants, and the workers) upon which the rational and integral organization of ancient Eastern societies was based.

War itself, having been mechanized, no longer knows warriors—in the ancient, classical, and medieval sense of the word—but only soldiers. Having been suffocated, the heroic will seek other paths, other outlets beyond the network of practical interests, passions, and cravings that is becoming tighter everyday. Maybe the popular enthusiasm for sports that our contemporaries exhibit is a deviated manifestation of this. Still, the struggle with the heights and the mountain precipices is the purest and most beautiful form, freed from everything mechanized and from everything that rarefies the direct and absolute relation between the self and phenomena.

The deep nature of the spirit that perceives itself as infinite and free, always beyond itself, beyond all forms and greatness found in or outside itself, awakens and shines forth in the "insanity" of those who, without a reason or purpose, climb peaks and crevasses with an indomitable will that asserts itself over fatigue, fear, and to the voice of the animal instinct of prudence and self-preservation.

To feel abandoned to oneself, without any help or way out, clothed only in one's own strength or weakness, with no one to ask for help; to climb from rock to rock, from grip to grip, inexorably, for hours; with the sense of height and of imminent danger, and the sense of solar solitude; the sense of unspeakable liberation and the cosmic breathing at the end of the climb, when the struggle is over and the apprehension is finally overcome; the sight of boundless horizons, for miles, and everything else beneath one's feet—in all this there is truly a catharsis, an awakening and a rebirth of something transcendent and divine.

Those who return at night to the valley below, and whom San Martino reabsorbs in the lighted and warm gardens of the great hotels where handsome men wearing colorful jackets and ladies devoted to tennis matches and tea parties gather—these individuals, without knowing it, carry in their eyes and in their tanned faces something that sets them aside as people of another race.

For my part, after becoming acquainted during World War I with the vertigo of heights (which I love and regard as the best experience of my life) understand and justify this "insanity," whereby, from time to time, broken bodies covered by a few alpine flowers are taken through gorges of a white-lime color, all the way to San Martino. Having attempted the same experience and risked the same danger, motivated by a nostalgia and by a passion stronger than myself, I feel that these short periods of time spent during the summer in the Dolomites give me the strength to stand up to, without compromise to my ideals, another struggle and a different effort, that of the demon of the metropolis.

Appendix E

Height

While, on one hand, the lower states of being have been symbolized by the earth, which in Western symbolism has been related to the human condition in general (see the classical derivation of *homo* from *humus*), on the other hand, the image of height, or of an alpine peak, which is a joining of earth and sky, is yet another natural expression of the states of being that in ancient times characterized the regal nature. Thus, in the Iranian tradition, a mountain—the mighty Ushi-darena, which was created by the god of light—was believed to be the seat of the hvareno, the mystical regal power. Moreover, according to both this tradition and to the Vedic tradition, the symbolic haoma or soma, which is thought of as a transfiguring and divining substance, is believed to grow on the mountains.

Moreover, "Your Highness" or "Most Serene Highness" are titles bestowed upon monarchs and princes as late as the modern era; their original meaning goes back to ancient symbolic connections, in virtue of which "mountain" or "pole" were different expressions of the same idea or function. The region elevated above the earth is the "mountain of health" or of "salvation" (the Montsalvat of the Grail saga); it is also Mount Rudra, conceived as a universal monarch. The Sanskrit expression *paradesha*, which is obviously related to the Chaldean *pardes* (hence, the Christian derivation of term *paradise*), has precisely and literally the meaning of "height" and of "high land." In this context I think it is legitimate to make a reference to Mount Olympus or to the western mountain that leads to the Olympian region and is the "way of Zeus"; to all the other mountains in various traditions that are the dwelling places of the gods, who personify the Uranian states of being; to Mount Shinvat, on which the "bridge which connects heaven and earth" is located; to the solar and polar mountains, such as the symbolic Mount Meru, which serves as the center of the world. These are all mountains that are related to myths and symbols of sacred regality and supreme rule.

Aside from the above-mentioned analogy, the visible psychological bases of this traditional symbolism are the primordial, wild, and nonhuman greatness and the inaccessible and dangerous character of high mountains.

More specifically, in the Nordic-Aryan tradition, the idea of the mountain is often associated with Walhall, the seat of heroes and of deified kings, as well as with Asgard, the seat of the gods (Asen), situated at the center or pole of the earth (in Mitgard), which is referred to as "shiny" *(glitnir),* as "sacred land" *(helakt land)* but also as "heavenly mountain" *(himinbjorg):* this is a very high, divine mountain on the peak of which, beyond the clouds, shines an eternal clarity, from where Odin observes the world. The divine Nordic-Germanic kings attributed their origin and their primordial residence to this mountain.

As a complementary motif, we may examine the theme of the mountain as a place into which those who have achieved spiritual enlightenment disappear. Such, for instance, was the Mountain of the Seer, which was inhabited, according to early Buddhism, by subterranean inhabitants, those who are said to be "further-men, victorious, and untouchable beings, self-awakened, free from all bonds." This motif is also connected with the regal and imperial idea. We should also remember the famous medieval legends, according to which Charlemagne, Frederick I, and Frederick II disappeared into the mountain from where, one day, they will return. But this mountainous subterranean residence is just an image of the mysterious seat of the universal ruler, which is an expression of the idea of the supreme center.

In the oldest Hellenic beliefs, the heroes are stolen from death and taken into a mountain on an island, which, even in consideration of its name (Leuke), corresponds to the "white island of the North," which the Hindu tradition regards as the symbolic dwelling place of the blessed and the land of the "living": a land ruled by Narayana, who is "fire and splendor." It also corresponds to another legendary island, where, according to some Chinese traditions, there is a mighty mountain, inhabited by transcendent men *(cheng* *jen).* By traveling to it, princes like Yu, who thought of themselves as good rulers, learned the art of government. It is important to recall that such marvelous lands, "cannot be reached by land or sea, but only by a flight of the spirit." The image of the island symbolizes stability, being detached from the continents and surrounded by waters.

In the exegesis of the writings by the emperor Fo-Hi, the notions of "transcendent men" who inhabit the "island" are often synonymous with the notion of "king." Thus, an excursion among the myths of the traditional world confirms again the doctrine of divine regality through these convergences and equivalences between the symbols of the regal function and those which, in various ways, allude to the transcendent states of being and to an eminently initiatory dignity.

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